ANURUPA CINAR

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BURNING FOR FREEDOM

"O Goddess of Freedom, Life is to die for you, Death is to live without you!"

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Dedication

In early 2009, I found myself armed with an utter conviction that the story of Savarkar should be told to the world, coupled with an absolute determination to do it—and not much else. Aware that I needed help, research sources, and a connection to Savarkar, I very hesitantly sent out a feeler thousands of miles away through cyberspace to www.savarkar.org and found a kindred soul—Dr. Shreerang Godbole.

To find someone who shared my passion—for bringing Savarkar to light, preserving his heritage, plus counteracting the anti-Savarkar propaganda—and to find it in a person of his dedication, intelligence, and caliber was a godsend. It still amazes me how such a successful endocrinologist, busy social activist, author of many books, and a bold and dynamic writer had faith in me—a faceless, unknown budding author making tall claims about writing and publishing a novel on Savarkar! It was his faith in me, his willingness to make time in his busy schedule to encourage me and give me whatever help I needed, that were crucial to me in finding my "writing feet" and gaining confidence, especially in that first year of writing.

For all this, and to have the name of my Kindred Soul linked to Savarkar and my book for posterity, I dedicate this book to Dr. Shreerang Godbole.

Acknowledgments

I could never consider my work on this novel complete without recognizing all those who were there for me during the process.

First of all, I thank God for bringing me so far in realizing my dream. I was always aware that besides hard work, grim determination, and dogged perseverance, I was going to need some divine intervention!

Without the unstinting understanding and cooperation of my children, Siran, Alexan, and Kapriel, I could never have started writing—never mind finished!—my novel.

I owe much to the late Dr. Arvind Godbole, who was Savarkar's physician. His faith and encouragement went a long way toward easing my path. I freely tapped into his vast store of knowledge to write several scenes. He read my completed novel—at a *great* inconvenience to himself—and gave me very valuable feedback. Mere gratitude is not enough to cover all that he means to me and my novel.

The Dedication already expresses what Dr. Shreerang Godbole means to my novel. Over and above, I can say that but for him the novel would not have been completed in this form. His contribution to my novel is everywhere in all aspects of it. On him I could depend on a frank, unbiased evaluation of any scene; his yardstick of plausible/implausible was a terror, but *so* essential, as there were scenes that needed revising. I kicked up a fuss sometimes! Rewriting scenes is quite the bane of an author's life. I also had what amounted to a writer's block when it came to the Keshu-Lakshmi romance. That was strange for I

had the scenes pegged out for ever. It was only after thoroughly analyzing the psyche of Keshu with Shreerang that I realized I had quite the wrong angle. Thereafter the words flowed out. Meeting him was the best thing that happened for my novel.

I must thank my parents, Dr. Prabhakar Sawkar and Dr. Indrayani Sawkar—who is a renowned author in India—for giving me tips. Their praise and appreciation of my novel gave a tremendous boost to my confidence. Without my mother's help I could never have translated Savarkar's poems into poetic form. I considered it imperative to intersperse quotes of them throughout this book, since Savarkar's heart and soul is in his poetry.

Thanks to my aunt, Nirmala Vaidya, who knew Savarkar and his family very well, I got a little glimpse into some private thoughts of Savarkar.

I am very thankful for the support of my friend Daniela Santos. Without her to look out for me, and especially for my youngest, Kapriel, it would have been impossible for me to write.

Very endearing were my sister-in-law, Mayda Gigian, and my friend, Anna Gyulakian. From the beginning, even before I had gained any confidence in my ability, they had no doubts. How often have they said to me: "*When* your novel is published . . ."—never an "*if* . . ." or a "*how* . . . ?" Every budding writer should be so lucky.

Thankfully for me, for they would be my sample readers, my lawyers Richard Feigenbaum and Eleanor Uddo, offered to read some excerpts of my novel. For two nail-biting, tension-filled days I was on tenterhooks. Then came Eleanor's e-mail—they had loved it! I was certainly down on my bended knees thanking God.

I am indebted to Shridhar Damle who went out of his way to help me in my research, despite the fact he had grave doubts about my being able to pull off such a complicated true-life story in a novel form and had reservations about Gandhi being so frankly revealed. Arguing with him on the subject gave

me great clarity of thought. The scene with Keshu and Bapat practically wrote itself after one of our arguments!

In the early days, my aunt, Medha Marathe, and my cousin, Madhuri Paranjpe, were the first to read the draft of part I. Their appreciation and enthusiasm sweetened the path I was walking on.

It was my friend Anita Craig's input that gave me the brainwave to split my novel into two books, for which I am very grateful. It caused me some heartache, though, for I had thoroughly enjoyed developing Keshu's story—the assassination plot, police case, and the courtroom scene—which is withheld from this novel. It will be an upcoming prequel to *Burning for Freedom*.

Most providentially for my novel, I met Christopher Manley in the nick of time—he sold me my new roof. His all-encompassing customer service included allowing himself to be roped into giving me *vital* tips on Mohini's death scene! *That* little scene would have held up the submission of my manuscript otherwise.

The day of submitting the novel was around the corner. There I was—tearing my hair out *and* going cross-eyed—chasing those errant commas and missing periods when my friend Cameron Cunningham came to the rescue. She offered to read the whole of my novel—in four days only . . . ! I could have fallen around her neck, sobbing tears of gratitude. She not only read it but gave her written comments—hallelujah . . . !—throughout the novel. This input was *invaluable*. Not only did it give me great joy to read her appreciative comments, but she put her finger on some pertinent points that I needed to clarify for the reader. At times I also have this quaint—what my kids call "language of the past"—style of writing. Cameron pounced on all such phrases (that had escaped my vigilance in editing) and I have faithfully, if with a regretful pang or two, made the changes. She also gave crucial tips on highlighting certain parts of the text. I am without words for expressing my gratitude to her.

Even as I write the acknowledgments, I feel so strongly that truly there has been a *great* deal of divine intervention in this venture of mine.

Lastly, I must thank all those nameless, faceless people who have worked hard to upload all kinds of details, books, and information on the Internet. Without this resource, I would have been stumped. There was so much to ferret out, some of it so obscure—like the name of the Queen of Jhansi's horse, which I was fixed on having for that scene—but armed with a few keywords on Google and oodles of patience, it was there to be discovered.

Anurupa Cinar

Author's Notes

Incredible as it may seem, this is a true story. *All* facts, incidents, and situations in this novel—whether directly given or referred to in conversations—are true and documented. I have taken particular care in researching the freedom movement of India from many viewpoints to separate the wheat from the chaff. Finding my way through the politics of India between 1942 and 1948 was a challenge! Many times I was taken over by a distinct feeling of being given the runaround by the various accounts. V. P. Menon's book, *The Transfer of Power in India,* was of invaluable help in getting to the kernel of truth.

Funnily enough, the easiest to research was material on Gandhi. *Vast* amount of it is written in a sycophant style—glossing over pertinent facts in its efforts at eulogizing Gandhi—but fortunately, plenty is still available factually written with no bias either way. Dhananjay Keer's biography on Gandhi is one such masterpiece. Indeed, it reveals many *shocking* things I have not been able to include in my novel.

Sometimes it took *months* to get to the bottom of things, such as the facts in the case of the ₹550 million owed to Pakistan and the sequence of events of the violence in Punjab in 1947, to name but two examples. The Moplah riots, too, are not widely publicized. Fortunately, there is a contemporary eyewitness account that is extant. I also found documents of the British government communications which were very helpful.

The words written between quotes in a different font throughout the novel are an actual quote (or its translation) of

the person mentioned in connection with it. A comprehensive list of the major books I have researched from can be found at the end of the book. The scenes in connection with my fictional hero Keshu and his family are based on real incidents.

I have largely avoided giving citations/attributes as I consider them inappropriate in a novel. I do intend to post them, at least the critical ones, on my website, www.anurupacinar.com. Occasionally, I have taken the liberty of taking things out of their real-time sequence or adding something fictional (Keshu's romance, some characters, or a conversation here and there). I point it out in the notes below.

I read my first biography on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (May 28, 1883-February 26, 1966) written by Mr. J. D. Joglekar at the end of December 2008. Savarkar's intellect and personality, his unwavering principles, and his ability to face adversity and move on fascinated me. But most of all, being a deep believer in the Bhagavad Gita, I was captivated by the realization that he was a foremost exponent of the Karmayoga.[1] I scoured the Internet, read everything I could find on him or that was written by him, and bought his books. I was shocked—*shocked*—to find that there seemed to be an active anti-propaganda campaign against him, a willful misrepresentation of his words and actions. Was it not enough that he was victimized, over and over, in his lifetime? Must his memory be besmirched so? The need to do something about it was eating into me. But what could I do? How was my voice to be heard? Who would listen?

And so the dream was born. I woke up one morning with the certainty that I would write a novel to showcase Savarkar as he was to the whole world. It was ridiculous, really, for I had never written anything past the schoolgirl essays that my teacher, Mrs. Kutti (St. Columba High School, Mumbai), used to love. Upon that flimsy foundation I took the plunge! The next

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1 A precept of the Bhagavad Gita, one of the sacred books of the Hindus, of acting in accordance with one's duty (dharma) without consideration of personal desires, other influences, or any attachment to the fruits of one's deeds.

day, I had my plot clear in my head. Out of the vast amount of material to choose from, I zeroed in on the events I considered essential for this novel. Very regretfully, I had to put aside two important phases of Savarkar's life—Savarkar in London and Savarkar in Ratnagiri. These are stories in themselves. I intend to write books on them in the future; at present, I am writing a book presenting documentation and analysis of the Hague Arbitration of the "Savarkar Case" (1910-11), including the details of Savarkar's heroic, incredible escape and the circumstances surrounding it.

For this novel, I needed a fictional character who could be with Savarkar throughout, and who also had links to both Pune—because I love it—and the Calicut area, where the Moplah riots took place. I wanted to show the world how and why the youth of India, coming from comfortable, educated backgrounds with secure and brilliant futures ahead of them, still chose to sacrifice all for the freedom and love of their motherland. I also wanted to touch upon the pathos of the plight of widows. And so Keshu was conceived. Every factor that went into developing his character, no matter how arbitrary it may seem, is rooted in something relevant. I had a lot of mental adventures working out his story, but those explanations belong to the prequel—Keshu's story.

For the purpose of simplicity in writing and not overloading the reader, I have limited the characters and scope of my novel; several people who deserve to be mentioned are either omitted or only briefly touched upon. One such is Appa Kasar, Savarkar's devoted bodyguard. He was my inspiration for Keshu's role as Savarkar's bodyguard—including the torture—and so I couldn't very well have him as a character in my novel. I do regret that very much.

The website, www.savarkar.org, is a wonderful website for comprehensive material on Savarkar. My write-up on the architecture of the Cellular Jail—which I was fortunate enough to visit—and my translation of Savarkar's poems are uploaded there.

The following notes can be read before or after the main novel at the discretion of the reader; they do reveal key parts of the story.

Chapters 1-7

- I have used Savarkar's own words recorded in his *My Transportation for Life* to develop his dialogues.
- The dates of the events in the Cellular Jail are not always accurate, as they were unavailable. The events occurred somewhere within the time frame.
- Keshu's experiences in jail are taken from the true-life experiences of the political prisoners. The electric shocks were applied to Babarao.
- Vishrambaug Wada was not being used as a prison at the time.
- The jail disciplinary system was made up of tindals, jamadars, petty officers, and warders, but I have used only warders for simplicity.
- Molestation of young convicts was a regular occurrence in the Cellular Jail, and Savarkar was vigilant in saving those he could.

  His first instance of saving a young boy from molestation was in 1913. Based on this fact I determined the whole of Keshu's character, age, his story etc. so that he could be brought to the Cellular Jail in 1913. I considered it a most effective entrance for Savarkar and a way of forming an immediate bond—so essential to my novel—between Savarkar and Keshu. The actual description of the scene itself is fictional and I developed the whole scenario from Savarkar's accounts of Barrie and of such situations.
- Dara, Sarfaraz Khan, Bhaskar, Bimal Ganguly, Raghu, Dhondupant, and Mrs. Mary Scott are not real characters, but characters I have made up to illustrate life as it was in the Andaman Penal Colony.
- Dr. Ayer, Mangaram, and Parikh are fictional names I have given to real characters.

- The conversation about "two life sentences" had taken place earlier in a mainland jail between Savarkar and another jailer.
- Barrie's conversation of "night and day" was in reality not with Nanigopal but with someone else.
- Sir Reginald Craddock was knighted in 1923.
- The attempted poisoning of Savarkar is a true event; that the poisoners came from the Malabar area is fictional.
- The Keshu-Mirza confrontation, Savarkar seeing the peacock, and the Keshu-Mrs. Mary Scott scene are fictional incidents.
- Lala Lajpat Rai's article was actually written in June 1916.
- The episodes with the Chinese convict, the credulous one, and Parikh happened later in Indian mainland jails.
- Gandhi's comment on the Armenian Genocide being a rumor is a fact, that Savarkar mentions it to Babarao is my fiction. I made it a *point* to hunt out a Gandhi-quote on it since I wanted to mention the Armenian Genocide as a tribute to my husband, Kapriel Vahan Cinar, who passed away on October 4, 2002. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide was a subject close to his heart.

Chapter 8

- Pongur is a fictional village.
- Details of the Moplah riots are true to the accounts of it.
- The correct sound of a properly wielded sharp sword would be "HIS-S-S-SHT" and not "SWOO-O-O-SH."

Chapter 9

- Keshu-Lakshmi romance is fiction.
- The temple in Aundh is extant.
- Savarkar did have his secret meetings on the Hanuman Tekdi and the surrounding hills.
- The temple atop Hanuman Tekdi did not have a bell.
- Vijaydurg is my granduncle's home.

- My great-grandfather, Ramchandra Sathe (himself a widower), married a thirty-five-year-old widow, Venutai Namjoshi, in 1917. He took this bold step in the teeth of severe opposition by society when even the great reformers advocated remarriage of child-widows only. I take much pride in this! Venutai lived in Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve's Mahilashram for widows and orphan girls in Hingne. A wing has been dedicated to her memory there.

Chapter 10

- The full names of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League are: Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha and All India Muslim League respectively.
- Shera is not the real name of the hit man sent to kill Savarkar.
- The change of plans on Acharya Atre's say-so happened at an earlier date.
- The Jodhpur Palace incident actually took place in 1956. Jadhav and Bahadur are fictional characters. The palace description is imaginary.
- Savarkar's speech is an amalgamation of his various speeches.

Chapter 11

- Vishwasrao has noted their problems in school in his memoirs; possibly the school concerned was in Ratnagiri and not Bombay.
- Mai used to call Shantabai Lakshmi, not Shante.
- The family dinner incident actually happened, but the reason why Savarkar did puja for Shantabai is my interpretation.
- The scene in the car with Bapat occurred at a later date.
- Mohite and Kambli are fictional, but such conversations with Babarao were a frequent occurrence. He always

carried the article in his pocket and showed it to people as proof.

Chapter 12

- The jail scene is an amalgamation of a few real accounts. All the characters were participants but were not necessarily there in the same jail or at the same time.
- Moghe is fictional.

Chapter 14-15

- There is a great paucity of material regarding Savarkar's breakdown and recovery. While the bare facts are available and true, the conversations and thoughts I have attributed to the various characters are a product of my imagination and my own personal experiences.
- The actual date of Savarkar's suspected heart attack is January 20, 1946.
- The description of Seth Gulabchand's home is imaginary.

Chapter 16

- Dutt in Noakhali is fictional. The incident is coined from accounts available.
- Mountbatten and Gandhi's conversation actually took place on June 4, 1947. Mountbatten had gotten an urgent message that morning from the Congress members saying that they feared Gandhi would denounce the Plan and its acceptance. Mountbatten immediately asked for a meeting with Gandhi and the conversation took place.

Chapter 17-18

- The conversations between Savarkar and Nathuram Godse are developed from available sources, especially Nathuram's statement in court.
- The Keshu-Nathuram meeting on January 16 is a mere fictional scenario I am presenting of what *could* have

happened when Nathuram visited Savarkar Sadan, as given in the time line in Manohar Malgonkar's book.

- The conversation following it between Savarkar, Keshu, and Gajanan is also fictional.
- I am not sure which jail Gajanan Damle was actually taken to; from Savarkar Sadan he was taken to the Police Commissioner's office near Crawford Market.

Chapter 19

- Gadre and Sakharam are fictional.

Introduction

The day—July 8, 1910; the hour—early morning; the place—the harbor at Marseilles, France. As the fingers of dawn curled across the sky, a tiny figure wriggled out of the porthole from the belly of the SS *Morea* and took the historic leap into the ocean, the cry "Hail! Victory to Mother India!" on his lips. That was the twenty-seven-year-old Vinayak Damodar Savarkar devoted heart and soul from childhood to just one cause: India for the Indians!

By the early 1900s, Indians were brainwashed into being satisfied with their slave status under the British rule. In this ambience, Savarkar—a Chitpavan Brahmin Hindu with the blood of the warrior Peshwas[2] flowing through his veins—was the first freedom fighter to proclaim that nothing less than total independence would do for India. Certainly, more drastic measures were required than the mewling of the Indian National Congress[3] to the British government for mere concessions for India. Savarkar applied his considerable brilliance, intelligence, and charm to the problem. He established Abhinav Bharat, his secret revolutionary society, which spread surely and swiftly within India. In July 1906, at the age of twenty-three, he set off for London, ostensibly to become a barrister. In reality his goals were manifold: studying the British law to circumvent it in his mission; spreading patriotism in the hearts of the intelligentsia of India, the

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2 Prime Ministers of the Maratha rulers wielding the actual power.

3 To be referred to as Congress throughout the novel.

Indian youth studying there; contacting revolutionaries of other countries and making a common cause for freedom of all slave countries; and making the plight of India an international issue.

This young lion was extraordinarily successful in his mission. The British realized the danger Savarkar posed to their empire. But they had only enough proof to make a case against him for supplying arms to India. To doom him for eternity on that flimsy evidence, he *had* to be extradited to India. The laws there were molded, like putty, to quash the first sign of any threat to the British Empire. They had no grounds for it, though. Desperate, they tangled Savarkar in a concocted charge by using a speech he had given four years earlier in India! A warrant was then issued to extradite him to Bombay, India. He was charged with sedition, waging war against the King of England, and procuring and distributing arms in London and India. After a few gyrations by the courts in London, to circumvent Savarkar's valid legal appeals that he be tried in England, an order was issued to execute the warrant. Now the Jaws of Hell—the judiciary system of India—could swallow him whole!

And here he was on this day making a final bid to escape just that fate. He swam single-mindedly until he reached the nine-foot high quay wall. At the second attempt—with *only* the grout between the dressed stone of the wall for toes and fingertips to grip!—he scaled that sheer wall. *Incredibly*, he had made it . . . ! He now had a right to claim asylum in France. But no—he was not yet safe; his guards were chasing after him down the ramp to the quay. With no time to even catch his breath after that courageous, daredevil escape, he ran for his life—the guards hot on his heels. Seeing a French sergeant, he stopped and tried desperately to communicate his plight to him. But it was too late . . . ! His guards swooped down upon him in *French* jurisdiction—quite, *quite* illegally—and dragged him willy-nilly back to the *Morea*—trampling all over the territorial sovereignty of France in the process.

His escape plan had failed, but in this failure was also success. Such gross miscarriage of justice would not, *could* not, be swept under the rug. An international hue and cry was raised. Savarkar's heroic escape and the treachery of the British were exposed throughout the world. But the die was cast. Savarkar was now at the mercy of the British to do with him as they pleased. He was sentenced to a total of fifty years transportation[4] to the Cellular Jail in the remote and dreaded Andaman Islands.

The British had hoped, no doubt, that this was the last they would hear of this Prince of the Revolutionaries. They could not have been more wrong. At sixteen, he had taken an oath to fight for the freedom of his beloved country—Mother India *must* be freed from the British stranglehold; her honor *must* be reinstated! And even under the most *horrendous* conditions, there was never a day, never a moment, that Savarkar swerved from his path.

He suffered within the walls of the Cellular Jail from July 4, 1911, until May 21, 1921; he was then transferred to the Indian mainland jails as the Andaman Penal Colony was closed down. Hard labor, even being yoked to the oil mill like a bullock, was his lot for almost thirteen long years before he was conditionally released—though not set free—from jail on January 6, 1924.

Throughout his life, Savarkar remained ever uncompromising of his principles and duty. He says in his poem, *Upon the Death Bed*:

Those for the essence of the welfare of the human race,
Only such deeds did I consider to be righteous.
Joyously have I borne this burden of my duty,
Ever true to my oath have I been.

He stood, unequivocally, for freedom and equality of all people. His ultimate political goal was a World Commonwealth

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4 Exile to a penal colony.

of Nations. Savarkar believed that Hindus could work toward freedom and equality in the whole world. But first they needed to be free themselves.

Hail! Attaining freedom themselves—
To uphold the cause of love and equality,
For the protection of the good people—
The Hindus shall set free the world![5]

To this end he developed and published the concept of Hindutva in 1923—while still incarcerated—and later put forward his basis for a constitution for free India. The heritage and history of Hindustan[6] is age-old, going back thousands of years before the birth of the three great monotheistic religions. The people of Hindustan should feel a sense of belonging to it; Hindustan should be their fatherland[7] and their holy land. That is the crux of Savarkar's Hindutva. As Savarkar puts it:

O Beloved Hindustan, you are
Our holy land! Our fatherland!
Our honor and our pride![8]

In 1937, Savarkar once again burst upon the political scene of India, free after twenty-seven years of British bondage. India was in dire straits; the political milieu then was one of Muslim appeasement, one of sacrificing Hindu rights. Injustice to

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5 Quote from the translation of Savarkar's poem, *Hark What the Future Portends.*

6 Age-old name of India. Meaning of Hindustan is "Land of the Hindus."

7 In Hindutva, perspective of Hindustan is *pitrubhumi*, "the Land of the Ancestors." *Father*land is the closest English translation of that Sanskrit word.

In the freedom movement, perspective of Hindustan is *matrubhumi*—motherland—the Divine Mother who gives birth to and nurtures the Hindustanis.

8 Quote from the translation of Savarkar's poem, *Beloved Hindustan.*

anyone was intolerable to Savarkar. Undeterred by adverse publicity, maligning, or misrepresentation by his detractors, he fought to defend the rights of the Hindus; he fought to preserve the integrity of India, to reinstate the honor of his motherland without ripping her heart out or chopping off her arms and legs.

Burning for freedom, his heart beat but one refrain:

O Goddess of Freedom,
Life is to die for you,
Death is to live without you![9]

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9 Quote from the translation of Savarkar's poem, *Hail to You!*

Savarkar's Proposed Guidelines for the National Constitution of Hindustan

(A) Hindustan from the Indus to the Seas will and must remain as an organic nation and integral centralized state.

(B) The residuary powers shall be vested in the Central Government.

(C) All citizens shall have equal rights and obligations irrespective of caste or creed, race or religion—provided they avow and owe an exclusive and devoted allegiance to the Hindustani State.

(D) The fundamental rights of conscience, of worship, of association etc. will be enjoyed by all citizens alike; whatever restrictions will be imposed on them in the interest of the public peace and order or national emergency will not be based on any religious or racial considerations alone but on common national ground.

(E) "One man, one vote" will be the general rule irrespective of creed, caste, race, or religion.

(F) Representation in the Legislature etc. shall be in proportion to the population of the majority and minorities.

(G) Services shall go by merit alone.

(H) All minorities shall be given effective safeguards to protect their language, religion, culture etc. but none of them shall be allowed to create "a state within a state" or to encroach upon the legitimate rights of the majority.

(I) All minorities may have separate schools to train their children in their own tongue, religion, or culture, and can receive government help also for these, but always

in proportion to the taxes they pay into the common exchequer.

(J) In case the constitution is not based on joint electorates and on the unalloyed national principle of one man one vote but is based on the communal basis, then those minorities who wish to have separate electorates or reserve seats will be allowed to have them, but always in proportion to their population and provided that it does not deprive the majority also of an equal right in proportion to its population too.

PART I

Prologue

February 1913, India

Barrister Madhavrao Phadke paced his cabin, back and forth. He had been at it for hours—no, *days*. The luxury of the cabin went unheeded. The curtains, too, were drawn across the porthole; he couldn't bear the sight of the sun's rays twinkling gaily on the brilliant blue water of the Arabian Sea. Oh, the cruel, cruel ocean, taking his beloved nephew far away to his doom! Oh God! Oh God! If only he could turn the clock back, if *only*! He didn't want to be here. Tomorrow he would disembark at the port of Calicut and head for his sister Mohini's house in Pongur. He had the most horrendous news to tell her. How should he do it? With what face could he tell her? What comfort could he offer her?

He stopped pacing and looked blankly up at the ceiling, brow furrowed, one hand pinching the bridge of his nose, the other running desperately through his hair. For days—since December 31—he had himself under rigid control. His house of glass had shattered that night when he held his dead son in his arms. Since then, he was living a lie. He flung himself in the armchair, his body wracked by sobs, both palms pressed tightly, very tightly, over his mouth. No sobbing sound should be heard on the outside. It wouldn't do to arouse curiosity. Even here, it wasn't safe. From now on, it would never be safe—anywhere. Always, always they would look worriedly over their shoulders.

Britain had established her empire here in India during the last hundred years or so. Indians were slaves in their own country. They had no constitution, no rights, *nothing*! While a few people were clamoring for some rights, still fewer—the revolutionaries—were trying to launch an offensive, against all odds. Under his very nose, living with him in his home in Poona, his nineteen-year-old son Damu and his fourteen-year-old nephew Keshu—a mere boy!—had become revolutionaries. He had had not the least idea how much they had loved their country, how very much they had yearned to free her from the British yoke. Both had been inspired to it by the charismatic, daredevil revolutionary, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Inspired by his writings and actions, certainly, for they had never seen him! His call to the Indian youth to save their motherland, to reinstate her honor, went straight to their hearts. Their plan to assassinate District Superintendent Glencowrie was successful. Though fatally wounded, Damu had escaped. He died shortly thereafter with a smile on his lips calling out to his Mother India—*oh Damu, Damu . . . !*

Keshu in his attempt to save Damu had become the latest victim of the British brutality. It didn't bear thinking about! Incredibly, young as he was, he had still managed to keep his identity secret as planned, just to protect them all. The British were as vicious and ruthless to the families of the revolutionaries as they were to the revolutionaries themselves. From now on, Keshu was no more Keshav Wadkar, son of Ramdas Wadkar of the Gaud Saraswat Brahmin caste. He was now Pulakeshiraj Soman, a Chitpavan Brahmin. Keshu had picked the name Pulakeshiraj after much thought. Pulakeshi II of the Chalukya dynasty was a renowned Indian king in the early 7th century. Also Keshu could still use his nickname—but that was all he could keep of his old life.

Madhavrao had schemed and arranged things so that he was Keshu's defense counsel; their relationship was kept secret. But other than saving Keshu some of the hardship of prison, there wasn't much more he could do. The British were *not* going to

acquit Keshu. They tried him in the Special Tribunal Court. There such details as concrete evidence or proof were not necessary, nor could appeals be made. A guilty verdict was a foregone conclusion. But the sentence . . . ! Transportation—banished to the Andaman Islands for twenty-five years. A harsh sentence for one so young, especially for a crime that could not be proved! For the next twenty-five years, Keshu was going to rot in a hellhole—if he survived. Not many did.

Savarkar was suffering in Andaman, too, sent there by *two* such contrived trials as Keshu's; his total sentence: transportation for fifty years. That was unheard of . . . ! The British certainly considered Savarkar very, very dangerous to the stability of their empire. They were on the rampage, punishing all Indian leaders with the capacity to stir the nation. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was banished to Mandalay three thousand miles away, Aurobindo Ghosh was nullified, and so many others found themselves in jail or transported on the flimsiest of charges. What Britain wanted was a safe politician in India—someone whom the Indians would love, but who would not threaten their empire. *Ha!* What a hope—where would they find such a one?

Madhavrao commenced his pacing again. He blocked his mind to everything except what he would say to his sister. Her life had been miserable enough so far; first the trials of an inter-caste marriage—their family was Chitpavan Brahmin—then she was widowed at fifteen with a baby to care for. Widows were pariahs in Hindu society. They suffered unspeakable injustice at the hands of society. As an outcast, Mohini had chosen to live a secluded but independent life in her home in Pongur—near Ramdas's hometown, Calicut—rather than be dependent on him in Poona. Her Keshu, *only* her Keshu, was her life, her joy, her solace. She had entrusted his care to him, her brother, and he had failed her in the worst possible way. Tomorrow he would have to tell her that! Somehow from now until then he would have to find the words to break this news to her. But how? *How?*

Chapter One

February-March 1913, India

February 22: Keshav Wadkar awaited his doom in the Thane Jail. Shortly, he would be on his way to the Andaman Islands with a group of fearsome convicts, called the Chalan. The Chalan was confined to the barracks, bound hand and foot, but were the convicts sobbing with grief? Railing and ranting against their fate? No! Just for a night or two, until dispatched safely from this jail, the Chalan was in control. The warders cajoled and pleaded with the convicts to behave and even doled out the much-prized tobacco leaf as a bribe. But would the worst convicts from all of India slip away like common criminals? Never!

They constantly egged each other on: "You fools! Keep the reputation of our Chalan. Bang your pots, rattle your chains, break the walls! Come on! Come on! Be its jealous guardian!"

Coarse and foul language echoed amidst peals of demoniac laughter. Walls collapsed and bars rattled; some convicts were whipped, others had their heads knocked together. But the pandemonium thrived unabated.

Keshu huddled on his blanket in despair, covering his ears with trembling fingers. He had suffered—oh God, *how* he had suffered!—in solitary confinement this month past. He had begged God, in pitifully weak moments, for some human contact. Was the Chalan—a human contact by the bucketful . . . !—the answer to his prayers? His head pounded.

His brain screamed. He sobbed helplessly. Some convicts made fun of him, jeering at him for being a baby. He was past caring. Already he was reduced to this abject state. Just *how* was he going to survive in Andaman?

After sentencing, he was whisked away from the District Court straight to the Yerawada Jail in the outskirts of Poona—with not the barest of farewells to Madhavrao. What was his family doing now? How was his mother bearing up? He didn't know—he *couldn't* know! He was Keshav Wadkar, her son, no more. This lost and lonely pitiful soul was Pulakeshiraj Soman. Oh God! He had lost them forever. *O Ma, forgive me! Forgive me!* More sobs wracked his body. The euphoria of boldly facing the persecutors of his Mother India, of justifying Damu's death—*oh Damu, Damu . . . !*—by saying his piece in court that had seen him through the trial was long gone.

Inexorably, his thoughts went to the past days in Yerawada Jail. His pretrial stay in Vishrambaug Wada Jail had been a slice of heaven compared to his life there. With no Madhavrao to protect him now, he was at the mercy of the jailers. Solitary confinement, meals served in the cell with a piss-pot in the cell as the only toilet facility; no walks, no outdoors except to the bathing area when a bath was permitted; no books and no writing materials; wearing coarse prison clothes and no footwear—such was his life there.

At first, he had diligently applied himself to an exercise regime to maintain his tall, muscular build and stamina, and to pass the time. Thoughts of Damu, Mother India, and of course, his hero Savarkar were his only solace. Would he meet Savarkar soon in Andaman? Would he . . . ? In the dark, dark abyss of despair, he clung tenuously to this hope. So five days had passed. On the sixth day he was given a heap of grain and a stone grinder. All day he ground grain. Being strong, he met the required quota. Each day the quantity was increased. By the fifth day, it was impossible to do so. *That* gave the warder all the opportunity he needed.

"You dog! You wretch! You kill our chief and yet dare to shirk your work here!" cried the warder, using his baton to hammer blows upon Keshu's unsuspecting shoulder.

Stunned, Keshu instinctively caught the baton.

"Shamshulbhai, Azizbhai! Come quickly! The convict is getting violent!"

Before he knew it, Keshu was locked up in standing handcuffs. For a week, he stood stretched against the wall during the day, hands overhead—dirty, dispirited, and alone—with no break for food or nature's call and no bath at all. At night he crashed on his blanket trying to hold body and soul together. He saw no one except the sweeper who cleaned his piss-pot and the warders who brought his two meals and strung him up—and that only for a few moments; then followed a day of more grinding of grain. Of course, with his aching arms he could not complete his quota, so back it was to the standing handcuffs. As he stood, his head drooped wearily on his arm. It was impossible to stand proud, quite impossible! In the two and a half weeks of the tomblike silence he was even wishing for the much humiliating latrine arrangements of Vishrambaug Wada—the communal, public, sit shoulder-to-shoulder and do your business routine. At least that way he saw and spoke to someone. *How the mighty have fallen*, he mocked himself. *Is Damu regretfully shaking his head at me from up there? Does he fear that I am weak? Does he despair that I shall crumble? Stiffen up, Keshu, stiffen up. How much worse can it get?* He found out soon enough.

An English officer, very polite and respectful, came to his cell. He was released from the cuffs. *How extraordinary*, thought Keshu suspiciously. Sure enough, the officer was trying to get him to talk about the conspiracy. He had told them nothing, even through the trial—no names, nor how they had plotted to kill Glencowrie; nothing except his false identity and a false age, sixteen years. But the British government, apparently, had not yet given up on him.

"Mr. Soman, you are at our mercy now. Tell us all you know."

"Officer, I can only repeat that I have nothing to say."

"Be careful, young man. Do you see this contraption in my hand? It is an electrical battery. Hardened criminals have broken down with one application from it!"

Keshu's heart contracted. How ominous it sounded!

The officer continued, "Why look for trouble? Tell all. Perhaps we can get you a pardon."

Keshu laughed sarcastically. The officer proceeded forthwith to put wires on him. Spasm after spasm rocked his body as the shocks were applied. He cried out in anguish. This was torture indeed! They alternated questions with shock until he was senseless, but Keshu did not break. He did not know *how* he would survive his exile, or if indeed he could. But one thing was certain, his lips were sealed. The safety of a lot of people depended on his silence. They left him swooning on the floor. After three days they gave up. He was back to solitary confinement, unmolested by anyone.

On the twentieth he was woken up early, allowed to bathe and change, and brought to the Thane Jail. A doctor had checked him out and declared him fit; now here he was in the thick of this turbulent disorder.

Two nights of this rumpus, and thankfully they were on their way. The authorities by no means made their travel easy. Each convict had fetters on his feet attached to the waist with heavy chains. Around their neck was a metal ring with a "ticket," a wooden badge stamped with their number and status. Keshu was a "D" grade convict, "very dangerous" category, like all the political prisoners. In addition, two convicts were handcuffed together. So they walked, barefoot, in a double line all the way to the railway station. Along every inch of the road people gawked, amused to see men being herded like cattle. Gathering every ounce of willpower, Keshu walked tall every humiliating step of the way—attached to the sweaty wrist of a fearsome convict by one arm, clutching his bedding under the other with a bowl in his hand. The sun was very hot, but he truly appreciated it and the fresh air. These had become rare luxuries in his life.

He breathed every lungful gratefully, remaining determinedly oblivious to the dirt and stones that harassed his unwary feet.

Too soon, they were cooped up in the train compartment. For three days and nights this miserable mass of humanity huddled together, still maintaining their state of uproar. There was not much else to do. The train streaked through wonderful scenic landscape, towns and cities, up the hill and down. But the Chalan saw none of it. The windows were kept shut. The boxed-in heat turned the compartment into a furnace. They traveled sitting, moving only to answer nature's call. Keshu shuddered from doing even that for, of course, he had to take his companion along. This was a wretched, *wretched* state of affairs.

They walked three miles to the pier from the Madras station. Here their handcuffs were cut off. The Chalan, feet still fettered, was piled into a small boat and taken out to the SS *Maharaja*, the ship plying trade from the ports of Calcutta, Madras, and Rangoon to the Andaman Islands. In the dark belly of this ship one end was portioned off by strong iron bars—a veritable cage! Into this cage they went. It was hardly big enough to accommodate so many. By the time they spread their bedding, there was not an inch to spare between any two on any side. There were only three tiny portholes located high up, supposedly providing ventilation. But they were no match for this stinking, reeking mass of miserable humanity. Mental pain and physical agony all had merged together. To Keshu it hardly mattered anymore. One had to hand it to the British—they were innovative in their inhuman treatment of convicts!

February 27: The *Maharaja* left the shores of Madras, sailing over the heartless ocean, taking these poor souls to untold, unimaginable horrors in the beautiful Andaman Islands. Some jumped at the window to catch a last glimpse of their motherland. Keshu was not one of them. Tears froze in his eyes as the wails of "Our homeland is left behind. Oh God, we are adrift!" swirled around him. He sat miserably on his

blanket; lying down was impossible—it brought him in touch with his sweaty, dirty, smelly neighbors on all sides. He closed his eyes to blank out the reality, but there was no escaping it.

The unnatural hilarity now subsided to a melancholy gloom. The convicts—illiterate, coarse, low, and the worst rogues—talked to Keshu kindly, if roughly, and tried to move their bedding to give him more breathing room. They held him in some respect for killing Glencowrie; they had no love at all for the police. This unlooked-for kindness brought more tears to Keshu's eyes. But relief from the wretchedness was impossible.

There were two casks in the corner, which served as their toilet. For five unrelieved days, they all used it for their nature calls. Some were seasick and couldn't make it to the casks in time. The throw-up was right there on the floor, bedding—wherever. It was a pitiable situation. Keshu tried hard to dissociate his body from his mind. Even the words of the Bhagavad Gita[10] brought him no solace—impossible to overlook the filth and stench in the airless gloom. Oh, he was ever so very far from achieving that august state of the yogic mind! Was it only the arrogance of youth that had made him confident about withstanding torture and pain?

March 3: The *Maharaja* dropped anchor in Port Blair, Andaman. As he came out of the deep bowels of the ship, the full glory of the astoundingly beautiful Andaman Islands burst upon Keshu's senses. It was an enchanting place! What irony that such a land of beauty should house the most desolate and desperate of human beings, inhumanly treated by a lordly handful!

The Andaman is a group of inhospitable islands with dense forests and high mountain peaks. Their beauty is an illusion except on the island of Ross which is developed, with as many creature comforts as possible, for the residence of the British officers. Development was done by the blood

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10 One of the sacred books of the Hindus.

and sweat of the prisoners, many of them veterans of the Indian War of Independence of 1857. It rains here for the better part of the year. Malaria is a real and constant threat. The local animal life—insects, leeches, snakes, and boars—is very vicious. Birds—crows, sparrows, kites, cranes, bulbul, and even peacocks—have been imported here by the British. The natives, the primitive Jarawas, are unfriendly and shoot poisoned arrows to kill on sight. The jungle duty is the most feared duty of all.

The Chalan was taken to the shore by a little boat. From the pier a long, steep ascent led up to the Atlanta point, culminating in the majestic Silver Jail, the crowning glory of Port Blair. Its golden turreted façade stretched wide. A tall, graceful peepal, the fig tree so sacred to the Hindus, peeped over its roof. The backdrop of long, *very* long, three-storied red-bricked wings with arched façades was awe inspiring.

The gigantic wings, numbered as blocks one to seven clockwise from the left of the entrance, converged like the spokes of a wheel into a central tower called *gomati*. An outer wall circled the boundary, touching each wing as it went, forming self-contained units. The walls stretching from block two and seven met at the two ends of the entrance building. The front of each wing overlooked the back of the next. The wings, unequal in length, had rows of individual 13' x 7' cells on every level. A wide barred veranda ran in front of them. The only lighting facility in the whole block was a lamp at each end of this veranda on every level. A staircase near the gomati end was the only access to the cells. On every story, a narrow walkway beyond this connected the blocks to the gomati. A barred gate stood between the block and this walkway.

The gomati was nothing more than a big central room with seven open arches encircled by a passage to receive the walkways from the blocks at each level. It had no staircase of its own. The only access to the roof of all the blocks was by a wooden staircase from the third story of the gomati. The gomati had one more level housing the bell.

Each self-contained yard had a workshop, a 15' x 1½' reservoir for bathing and washing purposes, and a toilet block. Some had wells for drinking water. Block 6 had workshops at the top level. Some first-floor cells in block 1 were reserved for hospital use. The yard behind the entrance had the double-story hospital to the left and gallows and the kitchens to the right. Block 1 ended just before the hospital building.

This distinctive architecture of the Silver Jail, designed to totally isolate the convict—from human contact, from nature, from anything that might, just *might*, gladden his soul for a brief moment—was entirely successful in its goal. Popularly called Cellular Jail, it was nothing more than a mammoth torture chamber.

And *yet* from the pier it beckoned warmly. How very like a palace it looked, with its outer trappings cunningly disguising the evil within. *Would this be just like a holiday camp*? wondered the stricken convicts. *Perhaps, just perhaps, we might find comfort and solace here?*

With this hazy fantasy glazing their eyes, the convicts hobbled up the path, clanking their chains. It was rough going. That gave the warders a chance to administer discipline. Thwack! Thwack! They wielded their batons skillfully on the backs of the poor convicts.

"Hurry up, you animal!"

"Are you dead? Move! Move!" they encouraged in the sweet way they had.

And it did, surely *did*, persuade the poor, tired miserable souls to push harder. At last they reached their "palace."

The Chalan was held in the entrance hall. The front and back of this hall had no walls, only iron bar grilles with gates. A narrow flight of six or seven steps led to the offices on the left and right. Above these, on the walls, were hideous weapons of torture; heavy shackles for the feet, and metal bands for the arms competed with bayonets and handcuffs. A festoon of manacles of every size and shape was worked into the form of flowers. It was grotesque!

The words "Mr. Barrie is here! Mr. Barrie is here!" circulated through the room. Keshu had read about this terrifying jailer in the reports the political prisoners had managed to smuggle out to the newspapers. A most ridiculous figure swaggered to the top of the steps. Keshu gaped. This mere midget—five feet tall and some three feet across, with round eyes and a flat, reddened nose, his globe-like belly encircled by a wide-buckled leather belt, and a fat, four-inch long cigar sticking out from under his bristly mustache—*this* was the Terror of the Cellular Jail? *Impossible!* But so it was. Barrie in his long years of service had consolidated a tyrannical rule, using the worst of the criminals as staff to run the jail. Only recently had the terror system been receiving some jolts by the advent of the political prisoners.

"Listen, prisoners. Do you know where you are? You are in my kingdom. I am God in this little world!" This was Barrie's set speech, meant to cast the Chalan into throes of terror. "There is one God in heaven, but he does not come within three miles of Port Blair! My name is David Barrie. These red turbans you see here are the warders. Follow their orders implicitly, for they give them at my command. Beware—I will show no mercy to those who disobey me. This place is impossible to escape from. Where will you go? The sea surrounds the island for a thousand miles. In the forest there are only boars, and of course, the leeches that will suck the blood out of you. Then there are the cannibal Jarawas. They will eat you—yes, eat you! So be warned!"

This tirade licked the already subdued and drained Chalan into a suitable shape. Barrie was immensely pleased. He thrived on bullying.

Then their fetters were cut off, as also was the *janeyu*[11] of the Hindus. The jail authority didn't dare cut the beard of the Muslim or the hair of the Sikh, but the mild-natured Hindus were fair game! The Chalan trooped into the yard toward the

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11 Sacred thread worn by three Hindu castes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya.

reservoir. Each was handed a strip of cloth barely big enough to cover the genitals. Swallowing his embarrassment, Keshu hastily donned the miniscule strip. It was going to be heavenly to feel that cool water against his filthy, grimy body. He went to dip his bowl.

"Halt!" cried the warder. "Wait for my command! Use three bowls, no more!"

What unwarranted meanness! Why were the authorities so stingy? But no one cared to argue with the warder. And so they all awaited his indulgence.

"Now!" he barked.

Even this measured quantity of water was a joy to experience as it cascaded down the body. Eagerly, Keshu took some in his unbrushed, unclean mouth to gargle—and spluttered. Salt water . . . ! The Cellular Jail special! Apparently they would have the dubious pleasure of having sea water for bathing and cleaning. Sticky body, spiky hair, and nasty mouth joined by a heaving stomach—that was the result of the first refreshing bath in several days. *Will I ever get used to this?* thought Keshu agitatedly. Before leaving the reservoir, they were given two sets of shorts and sleeveless shirts of rough cotton, and a cap. No footwear, of course. *That* was a luxury of the bygone days.

Keshu was taken to block 6 and housed in a middle cell on the second story. The warder gave him a rough shove in, clanged shut the barred door, and latched it. The cell contained just two items: a low plank and the familiar piss-pot. That's it. Besides the narrow door there was only one other opening, a small window set very high up. Barely any light dared to venture in through its awning. The whitewashed walls glowed eerily in the gloom. How like a cavern it was! The slightly curved ceiling heightened this effect. Desperately, Keshu tried peering up through the window, but all he could see was the underside of its deep, sloped awning. He rushed to the door. All that was visible through it was the barred arch of the veranda and a bit of the blank rear wall of block 7 beyond it. Even by craning his neck at all angles he could see no more. *Oh God! Oh God!*

He sank to the floor, overcome by the total sense of isolation. Eyes tightly shut, silent tears coursing down his cheeks, he crouched clinging to the bars. Surely he would go mad in a few days in this tomb? *What next?* he thought with dread. He opened his eyes; from this low position on the floor he could see the sky above . . . ! How welcome was the sight! Eagerly, he stretched out his hands toward that brightness. His spirit was so, *so* alone in this hostile territory. If only he could find one kindly soul, if only . . . . Somewhere here was his hero, his guru, but how to find him? How to let him know he was here? In what state was Savarkar? How had the authorities used that valiant spirit?

By the time the warder was back again, Keshu had managed to find a modicum of composure, but his head was pounding. He was escorted to the hospital. A cursory examination declared him fit. Realizing that if he didn't speak up for himself he'd be utterly lost, Keshu mentioned his headache. The doctor didn't care. But Barrie heard Keshu.

"You are not here one day and already you lie, you bombgolawala?[12] What headache, huh, what headache? Show me!"

"Sir . . . how . . . how can I show you a headache?"

"It's all lies, lies! You just want to shirk work, a big strong boy like you!"

"No, sir!" said Keshu, valiantly holding his ground. "I just want some medicine. I will do the work."

"Medicine? Ha!" jeered Barrie. "We give nothing without proof. You'll get used to our ways." That was that!

It was time for the lunch ritual. All the prisoners fell in line with their rusty iron plates in hand, rubbed their hands clean on the grass, and sat down—in the hottest part of the yard. The cook came and served the bread, rice, and a curry of what appeared to be leaves and twigs. The warders eyed the prisoners. With barely a wink they picked out their victims; those chosen

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12 One who makes/uses bombs.

handed over their bread to them, without a murmur! This was a daily fixture. Fortunately, it was not Keshu's fate today. He was hungry. Even this unappetizing food was a treat after days of dried lentils of the *Maharaja*. He broke a piece of bread and scooped the curry. *What* was this alien presence in his plate? He blinked and then jumped up in horror.

"Centipede! I have a centipede in my food!"

A warder stalked angrily to him. "Why are you standing up, you cretin? Sit down and eat quietly!"

"I cannot eat it." Outrage made him bold. "There is a centipede in my food!"

The warder looked in his plate, put a grubby finger in the food, and picked the offending culprit out. With one flick the centipede was cast off into the wide space.

"Show me this centipede," he demanded.

"I just did, and you threw it away!"

Barrie bustled into the yard. "What is all this shouting? Oh, it's you again, bombgolawala! How much fuss and trouble you make. You have more lies?"

Keshu realized the hopelessness of his situation. The warders and jailer were in collusion here. The proof was gone. He had nothing to show this self-proclaimed God. No one else, amazingly enough, was complaining. An insect was probably a regular savory to the sauce here! *Lump it, Keshu, just lump it,* he warned himself. He sat down and ate, choking on every morsel. It was impossible to leave some food unfinished, either! The warder was right there, slapping his baton on his hand.

"No wasting food here in jail. Eat every last bite!"

And that is what Keshu did. Ironically, he noticed some convicts had not finished eating; their plates were forcibly taken away and the food trashed.

For the rest of the day he was left alone in his cell to pass time in desperation, swatting flies and mosquitoes. After the evening meal, it was time to take the daily bath. On with the teeny loin cloth and off to the reservoir! Keshu was striking in appearance: tall, broad, and muscular; with chiseled features,

straight nose, and wide brow; and typical Chitpavan Brahmin light eyes, hair, and skin—a legacy from his mother. Exposed under the eyes of these convicts, he cringed. Some just stood and ogled him. *Oh for the familiar Chalan!* wished Keshu. The warder, Dara, even had the temerity to stroke his muscles.

"Wah, *chikne*,[13] what a bod!" he marveled.

Keshu shrank, beating his hand off. The beast just laughed, stroking his beard.

"Turn around, turn around. Let us see you from every angle."

This was awful. Why was this man gloating over his body? Oh, the shame of it all! *Oh, Mother Earth, hide me in your bosom,* he prayed. But no, he stayed right there, all but naked with so many greedy eyes feasting upon him. Then his savior arrived. A huge giant of a Pathan came to his side and put a protective arm around his shoulders.

"Dara, leave the boy alone. He is tender meat. Find someone your weight to play with."

Dara cracked out a loud laugh and left. Keshu could have wept with relief. He looked gratefully at the Pathan.

"Thank you, kind sir!"

The giant squeezed his shoulder. A little frisson of alarm chased down Keshu's spine. He was not comfortable with this brawny arm on his bare shoulder. How to say so without giving offense? The Pathan was saying, "I am Sarfaraz Khan. You can count on me any time. I will look out for you."

Was this the kindly soul he had prayed for?

Every prisoner was locked up in his cell after dinner. The episode at the reservoir had completely unnerved Keshu. Enveloped in a blanket of darkness, he lay on his plank willing sleep to come. Desolate, he longed for his mother. "Ma, O Ma!" his heart cried. Plop! Something landed on his stomach. A lizard! Keshu jerked nervously, swatting it off. Next thing he knew, his plank had overturned—so delicately was it balanced—and

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13 Smooth-faced one; good-looking one.

he landed on the floor with a bump. The lizard slithered off into the gloom. Keshu sat up, clutching his head hopelessly. "Ma, O Ma!" his heart cried again; then he heard a sob—an anguished, tortured, muffled sob. Was it his? But no, the sound was coming from the room to his right. Oh, what a wealth of wretchedness and despair was in that weeping!

"Hey!" he cried going to the wall, putting his lips close to it. "Hey, you are not alone here. Don't cry, please!"

The crying continued, unabated. He rushed to the entrance and tried to rattle the bars. Somewhere from the roof of block 7 there was a coarse shout: "You there, go to sleep! Why do you trouble us so?"

It was useless to appeal to these stony-hearted creatures. Keshu disappeared to the back of his room. All night he huddled in the corner wrapped in a blanket, listening to the crying. He could hear it long after it had ceased. Would this be his state shortly?

At six o'clock, hollow-eyed, he began his day. Toilet facilities could only be used at fixed times and never during the working hours. The system was very familiar, but here they went one step further. The next in line were waiting right before the ones squatting and using it. Not a second could be wasted, apparently. At the blow of the whistle the exchange was done in a trice!

They were given a breakfast of *kanji*, gruel of boiled rice, made so it had the least possible taste. Keshu sniffed at it suspiciously. Kerosene in the kanji! Surreptitiously, he eyed his neighbors. Everyone was eating stolidly. Keshu followed suit. Why make the utterly fruitless protest?

Then there was the daily drill of checking the prisoners. The warders squeezed the maximum drama from this tedious ritual. All the prisoners had to stand in a perfectly straight line at the loud ringing of the bell. At each command from the warder they had to perform one action—pull off their shirt; fold it; place it on the ground. Next they would be checked and the reverse order would be followed. Were all these synchronized

moves really necessary? Surely that much freedom could be theirs? Anyone slightly out of tune got two wallops from the ever-ready baton. Anyone not perfectly in line was walloped too. There was no end to this walloping. Who to complain to? Warder to jailer they were all in cahoots. Keshu glared balefully at one warder. For his pains, he was struck harshly across the face. Such colossal nerve of the man! But all Keshu could do was stand impotently, fists tightly clenched.

"Eyes down," yelled the monster. "Eyes down, I say."

Keshu did not comply. Thwack! Another smack landed on his face with force enough to stagger him. This time he stood eyes downcast. It was being very painfully drilled into his head that he had to be a mild cow. Not the slightest challenge was going to be tolerated or overlooked. These were truly the gods of the jail!

Per a strike settlement made a few months before, Barrie had agreed to keep political prisoners away from the *kolu,* the oil mill. Nevertheless, Barrie put Keshu to work on it. Keshu had read much of this kolu. They all, including Savarkar, had been yoked to it—just like bullocks! Now it was his turn. What his guru had been made to do he could certainly do himself—*and without a murmur,* he told himself sternly. Carrying a fifty pound bag of coconuts on his back, bucket in hand, he climbed to the top story of block 6. The first thing he encountered as he entered the workshop was a brawny fist thrust at his nose, squashing it.

"You will do as I say and obey my every word!" commanded the warder. "We need thirty pounds of coconut oil by the end of the day."

There was no arguing with that fist.

Keshu started his grind. The rod to be turned came at a height somewhere below his waist. Bending at an awkward angle he gripped it and pushed with all his might. Round and round he went yoked to the mill, muscles rippling powerfully, sweat rolling off his body. The warder began adding more and more coconut to the central container. Even with his strength,

it was hard going. How did the weaker men fare? But there was no room for idle thoughts. In ten minutes his throat was parched.

"Water, water!" he gasped.

He was given some with the warning that he could have only two cups all day. Keshu had no time to gape at this inhuman injunction. He had a quota to finish. His limbs felt paralyzed, but on and on he went. The lunch hour was the barest interval, just long enough to gulp the food down before going back to the mill. A cup of milk was served to the workers of the oil mill. Keshu got the merest whiff of his milk before the warder took the cup out of his hand and swigged it down his own throat. But at the end of the day, Keshu had his quota ready. Some poor soul was crying, for he was not so lucky. The warder was berating him and giving him a dose from the business end of the baton.

"See you, you sniveling rat. Now poor Barriesaab[14] will have to give up his after-dinner leisure and supervise while you make up your quota. Trouble, that's what you are!"

Well, that was one way of looking at it. Poor Barriesaab, indeed! There he would sit on his special carved chair—so like a wooden throne—gloating delightedly over the spectacle of a miserable scrap of humanity, broken in body and spirit, being spurred on by the vicious baton to turn the impossible kolu.

That evening at the reservoir his guardian was again hovering around him with a protective arm. Keshu was really uncomfortable. But perhaps it was better to tolerate this man who meant him well than to be exposed to all others who had evil eyes? Sarfaraz told him some funny anecdotes. Keshu even laughed; it was so long since he had done so. But when the time came to go back to the cell, he was relieved. There was something very disturbing about this—but just *what*?

Keshu was exhausted. Tomorrow was another hard day's work. Laying down his aching bones on the plank, he slept. In

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14 Saab, sahib, saheb: sir.

the pitch dark of the night his eyes shot open. There was that crying again; this time, not so muffled. What . . . ? Was that a bang? What could his neighbor be doing? Then he heard the plank fall, followed by a loud grunt—no more crying, only a muffled choking. In that second, Keshu leaped up and rushed to his door.

"Warder!" he shouted. "Warder!"

"What is it, you blasted troublemaker?" came a tired, angry voice. "Two days here and you have made so much fuss already."

"Warder, my neighbor has hung himself, I think. Hurry! Hurry! Save him."

That got the warder's attention. Keshu could hear some action going on near the gomati. There followed the clatter of footsteps leading to his neighbor's cell. But they were too late. The poor man had died. Keshu had not been able to save his life. How shattering! It was that easy to snuff out a life.

The next morning, over the tasteless kanji, his neighbor Bhaskar had information.

"Babu,[15] that man was here for killing his wife, you know. All this work, work, work, and the beating when one has no strength for it . . . ! How much can the spirit take? He was so worried about his children too. He couldn't take it anymore, I suppose"—*just how many lives were crushed out here?*—"there is another Bengalibabu, Ullaskar Dutt. He is in big trouble too."

"Ullaskar Dutt! But he was one of the leaders in the Alipore bombing!"

Revolutionaries in Bengal were harassing the British with their bomb-throwing schemes. The British had captured and punished several revolutionaries in the Alipore Bomb Case. Many were here in the Cellular Jail.

"Yes. He is very unwell right now and punished with standing handcuffs."

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15 Gentleman.

Just then the warder swooped down upon them. Both were whacked for talking. This day passed by much like the day before. Keshu was impatient for the dinner hour, desperate to learn more from Bhaskar. But this evening he was not placed next to him. Talking was strictly forbidden for the political prisoners. Swift action was taken to separate him from Bhaskar.

At the reservoir he tried to pump Sarfaraz, who only laughed everything off.

"Why do you worry your brain? Leave others to their fate. You make sure of your comfort; I'll help you with that."

How very selfish and repulsive! But what can one expect from criminals, after all? Keshu had to retire to his cell frustrated. Thoughts of the dead Bimal Ganguly and poor Ullaskar Dutt preyed on his mind, haunting his soul in the eerie darkness. There was so much misery here. How many had died in his cell? The walls of this behemoth must be soaked with tears, the cells echoing with their groans and wails. Oh, what was that wailing? Another tormented soul lamenting his misfortune? No, no, it was only the wind. Hysteria was rising within him. With great effort he quashed it down. *This night, oh please God,* he prayed fervently, *let sleep be mine.*

But it was not to be. Blood-curdling howls shattered the peace of the night. Keshu rushed to his door again. *Was this how every night was going to be spent here? One poor soul after another caving in to the pressures of this atrocious life! What was happening? Oh, who was howling so? God, oh God, these cells . . . ! Why no light? Why were they built so that nothing was visible from them? What an absolute sense of isolation!* All night the silence was shattered by piercing, heartrending cries alternating with loud laughter and even some trills of birds and other animal sounds. *What is this?* Keshu wondered. *Has some poor soul lost his mind?* At this rate his own was going to shatter too! There was the cry again, "Ama . . . Ama!" Oh the poor, poor man, calling piteously for his mother so! The cries were pulling at Keshu's heartstrings. The night passed yearning for his mother, aching for the unattainable.

The next morning, news that Ullaskar Dutt had become insane flew all over the jail. There was some talk of applying electric shock to him. Keshu was stunned. Electric shock! He shuddered in dread, his mind distraught by the memories of his own ordeal. Intermittently, horrible screams were resounding in the jail. The shocks being applied to poor Ullaskar! It was horrible, just horrible. Today he was not going to make his quota. He just could not push himself. The warder beat him with the baton.

"Move! Move, you big ox! Keep it turning!"

Keshu collapsed to the floor bawling like a baby. He was terribly ashamed of himself, but the racket would not stop. Even the warder was nonplussed. Then Sarfaraz was there. He lifted him up tenderly and himself finished the rest of Keshu's quota. Keshu was ever so pathetically grateful.

At dinnertime, Sarfaraz surreptitiously brought a little present for Keshu, some fish that he had cooked himself, for he was allowed to prepare his own meals. Keshu loved fish—Gaud Saraswat Brahmins are fish eaters. He wolfed it down. But unfortunately, and with a little conniving by Sarfaraz, one of the Hindu inmates saw him.

Food for the Hindu convicts was cooked by Brahmins only. Hindu and Muslim seating arrangements were also kept strictly segregated, just to maintain the "purity"—paramount to the Hindus—of the Hindu convicts. Eating from a Muslim's hand—*that* was an irredeemable blasphemy! *That* Hindu was a Hindu no more. The word of Keshu's fall from grace swept swiftly around block 6; there was an uproar. The Hindu convicts refused to let Keshu sit down to eat with them. The warders at once came to investigate. Several voices babbled together.

"You cannot sit here now, you fool! Why did you do such a thing?" said one warder when at last the problem was understood.

"What did I do so wrong?"

"You broke the jail rule, for one thing. For another, you, a Hindu, ate from a Muslim's hand. You are now an outcaste!"

Was there no end to the tragedies? How ridiculous to be cast away, no more a Hindu, on the authority of these convicts. Even *here* they clung to the inequities of Hindu society! Were they really going to take away the only thing that the British had allowed him to keep—his religion?

"All right then. What do you want me to do?" he said dejectedly.

He was seated with the Muslims for dinner. His night passed shivering with dread and breaking out in cold sweat, utterly wretched. The next day he was punished with standing handcuffs. So he stood, listless—strung up by his arms, hardly aware of the pain. Did he pass out or sleep? He neither knew nor cared. Dinnertime slipped by in a haze. Sarfaraz tried to cheer him up, but Keshu, wrapped up in a world of his own, could not be reached. After lockup he slouched apathetically on the plank. A vast emptiness had pervaded his soul. What next? Where to go from here?

Suddenly, two silent shadows were at his door and one slipped in. There was no mistaking that colossal form.

"Sarfaraz! Why are you here? Did you bribe the warder?"

Sarfaraz shut the door, not replying immediately. The air crackled with a queer kind of excitement. Keshu felt a tingle chase up his spine. *This cannot be a good thing,* he thought, *but Sarfaraz is my friend; he won't hurt me, will he?*

"Sarfaraz!" he called sharply, jumping up. "Is that you?"

There was fear in Keshu's voice.

"It is me, Pulakeshiraj; it is me." Sarfaraz came right up to him. His lips close to Keshu's ears, his beard scratching his skin, he whispered, "Alone at last, chikne, alone at last!"

"What do you mean? I want you to leave at once!" Keshu stepped back, trying to put a distance between them.

"Why all this outrage, chikne? You liked me well enough before!"

Quick as lightning, Sarfaraz grabbed Keshu, turned him around, and smashed him right up against the wall, hitting his head hard against it. Keshu was knocked out for a moment;

that was all Sarfaraz needed to cuff Keshu to the wall. He had come prepared. Keshu recovered to find himself suspended by his arms with Sarfaraz's body plastered to his back from hip to shoulder. It was—*disgusting*!

"Get away, you monster! Get away . . . hmmph . . . mmph!"

A huge hand clamped on his mouth, and then the monster swiftly bound his mouth with a piece of cloth. *Is that his loin cloth?* Keshu gagged on the thought. Desperate, he tried shaking him off in a frenzy of movements. But the man was as strong as an ox. Fear was now oozing out of every pore. *What is he going to do to me? Rape? Do men rape men? How? Why?* wailed his outraged brain silently.

But Sarfaraz had all the advantage. He was in a high state of arousal, exhaling in heavy panting breaths.

"So beautiful"—his tongue was licking at Keshu's face, and his teeth were biting his ear—"so beautiful you are!"

Tears of helpless rage poured down Keshu's cheeks. He struggled frantically, again and again, but in vain.

"So tall and muscular," the awful voice wheezed on. "Such as you has never come here before."

How could he ever have thought him a friend?

Sarfaraz was fondling Keshu's arms, and grinding his hips against Keshu's. The monster's engorged penis was thrusting suggestively at his buttocks. Waves of revulsion were chasing up and down Keshu's body, and still he stood helpless as Sarfaraz slobbered over him. Then the fiend moved lower, his hands raising Keshu's shirt, kneading the flesh while his mouth was ravaging his back.

"Aah . . . aah!" he grunted in great satisfaction, lost in his depraved desire.

Through the fog of this ultimate treachery, Keshu realized that help would come only if he shouted for it. Vigorously he rubbed his cheek against his raised hand, trying desperately to dislodge the filthy cloth. He whimpered and cried but worked assiduously at it, all the same. It was coming loose. *Come on, come on . . . come on,* he urged it silently. At last it was off!

His yell for help was cut off at the onset. With one swift movement Sarfaraz had pulled Keshu's shorts down and thrust his body away from the wall. Keshu's arms were stretched excruciatingly.

"Uh . . . uh," he cried out in pain.

And then the monster was between him and the wall, his mouth attached to Keshu's penis. He sucked and sucked in great enjoyment, eyes closed, lost in his sick world. And Keshu screamed. *How* he screamed! This outrage passed all bounds. He howled as if the fires of hell were roasting him—wild with rage and disgust at this unmitigated violation.

Three or four warders were there within minutes of Keshu's first scream. One quickly swiped the baton on Sarfaraz's head, hitting him over and over until he was knocked unconscious; another unlocked Keshu's cuffs.

Keshu pulled up his shorts, flung the gag cloth off, and dived to the plank in his cell. He picked it up and held it like a shield before him. He trusted no one—not even his rescuers. Was it not a warder who had let Sarfaraz in? He was still shrieking; he would *never* stop! The warders tried rushing him. Keshu swung the plank wildly, but overpower him they did. More of them came up, and between them they dragged the resisting, howling Keshu to the hospital. The doctor was already there. One look at Keshu's state and he asked, "What happened to him?"

"He was molested by Sarfaraz."

The doctor shook his head regretfully. Sedative, that's what he needed! Keshu, so viciously stripped of every last vestige of childlike innocence, distrustfully fought them tooth and nail; but at last the dose was administered. Keshu welcomed the oblivion.

Chapter Two

March-Early April 1913

There was no sleep for Barrie that night. What an awful week!—first the suicide, then Ullaskar, and now Pulakeshiraj. How to steer clear of this debacle? The Chief Commissioner could hardly overlook so many incidents, two of them involving the bombgolawalas. The suicide could be glossed over. Ullaskar's case could be covered up; he was insane. But what was to be done with this one? What if he made a big fuss? What if he killed himself? He was the youngest convict ever to be sent here and not a week had gone by yet. Should this news reach India, by the conniving of the political prisoners, the scandal would be horrendous! It wouldn't do to have questions raised in the parliament in London. . . . No, it had to be controlled—somehow.

There was only one solution—Savarkar! Though Barrie habitually harassed Savarkar he was prone to take his problems, especially those with the political prisoners, to him. Eminent personalities and foreign dignitaries, too, made special stops at Andaman just to meet Savarkar. Such was the caliber of his stature. And so, Barrie at his ingratiating best was before Savarkar first thing the next morning.

"Mr. Savarkar, one of your own has had a little upset yesterday. Perhaps you can help us."

"A little upset? Is that what you would call it?" asked Savarkar ironically.

Through the spy system he had organized in the year and a half or so of being here, Savarkar was fully aware of the circumstances. He had warned Bajira, a Hindu warder very faithful to him, to watch out for Keshu. Bajira had reached the scene quickly but not soon enough—no, not soon enough.

"I had nothing to do with this. I don't know what happened," Barrie whined, very much on the defensive. "We have moved Sarfaraz to Viper Island on jungle-clearing duty. Can you talk to the boy? He will not let anyone close."

"Hmm, now let me see-e-e . . . ." Savarkar rubbed his forehead, pretending to think. "I can help you, Barrie, but only if the boy is moved to a cell close to mine."

Barrie was not happy with that; he hemmed and hawed, but as Savarkar was adamant, he was forced to comply.

In the hospital, Keshu was still distraught. His skin crawled. His stomach roiled. Were such horrors to be his lot in life now? *Oh God! Oh God! I am so, so alone. Where to go? What to do? Whom to trust?* Here in the hospital room he was safe—perhaps. But soon, soon they would kick him out of here. What then? He had borne every atrocity so far, but this . . . ! No, no, it was better not to live. *I have done my duty by you, O Mother. I can die happy with the thought. Others have managed to hang themselves. Surely I can too? Oh, I must . . . . I will!* He was one heartbeat away from a fresh bout of hysterics.

The door opened. In walked a convict, a diminutive figure, no taller than 5' 2". Keshu groped for the piss-pot he had kept handy—he was fed up of the warders bothering him. Wait a minute! He had seen that face, those distinctive cheek bones, before in the newspaper. Compelling, deep-set eyes gazed steadily at him through round, gold-rimmed spectacles. In one bounding leap he was out of bed and at the feet of his guru.

"Tatyarao![16] Tatyarao! Tatyarao!" he repeated over and over, forgetting formalities and addressing Savarkar familiarly.

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16 Tatya: term for father/elder; Rao: used as a suffix out of respect.

A profound gladness flooded all of Keshu's being. Was this going to be the saving of him? Savarkar picked him up and led him to the bed. Smiling, he said, "We shall talk in Marathi. No one around here understands it."

Keshu nodded speechlessly.

"Pulakeshiraj, I have heard of the tragedy that befell you."

Keshu came down to earth with a crash. Shamefully he hung his head. He could not meet Savarkar's eyes. "Please," he muttered, "call me Keshu."

"Do not be ashamed, Keshu," said Savarkar. "What happened was not your fault. How can shame be yours, then? Unfortunately, in this cesspool the wicked prey on the young and innocent. Pity was that I could not save you in time." He paused in sorrow.

"You were going to save me?" asked Keshu, looking up in wonderment.

"Life is very difficult here, to say the least, but we have a system of sorts. The fiend made his move too fast."

"Tatyarao, how can I go out there again?" Keshu wailed. "Wearing that strip of cloth and receiving all those covetous looks. Now I understand what it all means! I hate this body! That monster, Sarfaraz, he . . . he . . . ." A sob escaped his lips. "It is better to kill myself."

Savarkar held his hand reassuringly. "Sarfaraz has been transferred to another place, and look, Barrie, our self-proclaimed "God," has smiled upon you already. You are to be shifted to my block. You will be safe there, I promise. Will you trust me in this?"

Looking into those mesmerizing eyes, Keshu could have agreed to anything. He nodded.

"As for killing yourself," Savarkar continued, "you will be playing into the enemy's hand. They are keeping us here in utter degradation precisely for such an end. Your death will serve the enemy; your life will serve our Mother, our Hindustan!"

"But, Tatyarao, the shame . . ."

"We have all been through some form of mortification, even I. It is only a body, Keshu, just a vehicle to carry our soul," said Savarkar, mentioning a precept of the Bhagavad Gita.

"Oh, Tatyarao, I am a *deep* believer in the Gita too."

"*That* will certainly help you pull through. I also constantly keep the words of the Yoga Sutra before my eyes. It tells us that in prison we may have to pass through agonies of the mind *and* suffer tortures of the body. But if we cave in to these, then our principles and ideals are merely an illusion."

"Oh!"

"Is this all it amounts to, this courage and ardent spirit of ours, this love for our Hindustan? A mere passing fancy . . . !"

"No! No, Tatyarao, never! But . . . but do you really think I can pull through?"

"Yes, Keshu, I do. You have the will and the courage to survive this adversity"—Keshu squeezed his hand thankfully—"focus on the core of your being. Keep it strong and let all else fade away. And, Keshu, get out of this hospital—soon! Barrie could change his mind any second. *That* would be a disaster!" Savarkar's eyes gleamed. "Tomorrow is Sunday. Spend it with us. See how we fool the authorities!"

How lucky he was to have Tatyarao as his champion! He would focus on the positive; he must! Why should he brood on that monster of depravity?

"I will do as you say, Tatyarao, I will!" Keshu avowed fervently.

"I do not doubt it for a second. You are a brave Son of Hindustan! We know all about your case here." He patted Keshu's shoulder. "You did not betray your compatriots to the police. Not too many can achieve that glory!"

Keshu gazed adoringly at his hero, proud to hear such accolades from him. "Tatyarao, I have taken the oath to serve our motherland. But how hopeless it is here!"

"We do not admit to hopelessness," declared Savarkar. "United there is much we can do—educate the people, spread the love of our beloved Hindustan. Our life is not to be wasted away, even here!"

Keshu was a model patient thereafter. He was allowed to have a solitary bath—for which he was grateful—then discharged from the hospital. Alone in his new cell, the horror of the night before threatened to engulf him, but he sat down and meditated deeply on the words of his guru. There was a rattle at his door. He jerked in alarm. It was only a warder holding out a book. A book . . . ! What an age it was since he last saw one!

"This is badebabu's[17] own book," whispered the warder. "We have smuggled it in for you. Keep it all night. But be careful, or you will be punished."

Book sharing was strictly forbidden too.

Keshu hugged the book to himself. Badebabu must be Tatyarao. It would give him much solace to hold this book through the night. As he turned toward his plank, the light falling on the wall showed up some queer markings. Curious, he went to investigate. They were words—some Hindi, others Marathi—scratched in the whitewash! How odd. Avidly he read them—a full outline of Spencer's *First Principles* and a poem titled *Kamala*. Now Keshu had no doubt. This was Tatyarao's work. He was a superlative composer and extremely well-read. Did he really do this in every cell he stayed that the next tenant may benefit from his knowledge? What an amazing man he was!

As darkness fell Keshu was afraid he would be riddled with nightmarish thoughts. Clutching the book, he focused on Savarkar. The British had accurately gauged the great danger Savarkar posed to their empire. For that reason they had manipulated the legalities to bring him here to rot—helpless and impotent, or so they hoped. They had grossly underestimated their man. At sixteen, Savarkar had taken a solemn oath to fight for the freedom of his beloved Hindustan; nothing, bar death, was going to deter him. Dwelling on all that he knew

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17 Bad*e*babu: senior gentleman, used in this book for Hindu dialect; and Bad*a*babu, for Muslim dialect.

of Savarkar, Keshu managed—somehow—to keep thoughts of Sarfaraz at bay all night.

The next morning at breakfast-time, Keshu's tenuous newfound poise was undone. The Hindu convicts in block 7 were just as inflexible as any. They objected to Keshu, the outcaste, being in their dining group. The warders were called in again. A horrible blackness threatened to overtake Keshu's consciousness. But Savarkar was true to his word.

"Brothers," he appealed, "we all know how this young boy suffered yesterday when the community ostracized him. Is this how we will treat our young? Throw them to the wolves? No!"

"Badebabu, he is now despoiled. He ate from a Muslim's hand," said one.

"And why should a Hindu lose his religion by eating from the hands of a Muslim?" argued Savarkar passionately. "Have the Hindus lost their power of digestion? Come, come, brothers, we have to feed on the food of the whole world and yet remain staunch Hindus. That is the way of our salvation."

"No, no, badebabu, even the government here allows us to maintain our purity! Why should we give that up?"

"The sweat and dirt off the cooks' bodies has cast no blight on your purity! Nor has your religion been affected by eating food contaminated by centipedes, mice droppings, worms, and snakes. Why then should it be despoiled by the touch of a human hand?"

"Badebabu, that's a very good point. But—"

"And how about the belief that crossing the ocean makes a Hindu an outcaste?" Savarkar swept on. "Have we not crossed a thousand miles of ocean to get here? Yet Hindu we proudly are and remain. If we can set aside one inconvenient precept to suit ourselves, why should we not do so to them all?"

"Yes . . . yes . . . but . . ."

"Don't fall for the tricks of the wicked Muslim warders! Today, you disown your own; tomorrow, they will convert him to Islam. Is that what you want, that one by one they should convert us all?"

"No, badebabu, no . . . all the same . . . ." Still they dithered.

"Our superficial rigid beliefs are what damage the consolidation of the Hindus," stated Savarkar. "We have to call a halt to it! If you believe Pulakeshiraj is impure, then let us purify him with the sacred *tulsi*[18] and the chanting of the stanzas of the Gita. Lord Krishna himself has said that he lives in the heart of one who meditates upon him."

As a clinching act, Savarkar whipped out some tulsi leaves. Keshu ate them while reciting a few verses from the Bhagavad Gita.

"There!" pronounced Savarkar. "Keshu is purified now!"

Savarkar's eloquence and simple method of purification won the day. The Hindus tentatively accepted Keshu. He was allowed to sit at the end of the line, close to Savarkar and a few other political prisoners. This was a major breakthrough in the Cellular Jail.

Sunday was a holiday, free of hard labor, even here in this hellhole. The prisoners washed their clothes, weeded the yard, did other sundry jobs, and got haircuts and shaves from the barber convicts. Under cover of all this activity, the political prisoners got together in little groups and involved themselves in discussions and talks. Some even came from the other blocks—by the conniving of kind warders or by bribing others. *So this was what Tatyarao meant,* thought Keshu. It was indeed very refreshing. He had never experienced the company of so many admirable men! All of them were from well-educated and cultured families, with potential for brilliant futures, and yet they had thrown it all away for the love of Hindustan.

There was Nandagopal Chopra, a Punjabi Kshatriya. How calm and tranquil was his mien. What did they call him here? Ah! The immutable Brahman![19] He was giving the jail staff a run for their money. Barrie's favorite epithet for him was "the Mad One." He did everything at his own pace. No

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18 Basil—sacred to the Hindus.

19 The Supreme One; the Almighty in the Universe.

amount of punishment, bullying, or cajoling budged him. Civil disobedience at its best! Hotilal Varma—bold and outspoken; his was the daring that sent that first letter, exposing the reality of Cellular Jail, out to Calcutta. Two others were Ram Hari and Ladha Ram; all four were successive editors of the magazine *Swaraj.* The Government put them in prison one by one, but the magazine, full of patriotic articles and poems, was put out there for all to read. Ramcharanlal Sharma—tall, handsome, and arrogant—was here on a ten-year sentence. Ganesh Savarkar, called Babarao, was on a life sentence here for publishing a couple of allegedly seditious poems . . . ! He was Savarkar's elder brother; *that* was his major crime. No one could keep good health here, but Babarao was in dire straits. He suffered from migraine, now coupled with frequent dysentery. Wamanrao Joshi, a Maharashtrian like the Savarkars and their close associate, was also here on a life sentence. All others were revolutionaries from Bengal, involved in one bombing case or another. Barindrakumar Ghosh was the younger brother of the spiritual revolutionary, Aurobindo Ghosh. He and Ullaskar Dutt had been the leaders in the Alipore Bomb Case. Hem Chandra Das was a kindly, gentle soul full of good stories.

One and all suffered brutally at the hands of the warders. The authorities deemed six months incarceration in the Cellular Jail as more than enough to break the spirit of any convict, even the toughest rogue. Any more was considered beyond inhuman—*yet* the political prisoners were kept here far, far longer than that.

And they had not the respite of seeking refuge in the hospital. The rule about proof was especially created for them. The thief, the dacoit, the cutthroat all had easy access to the hospital. Many faked their illness in several ways. The paste of oleander, if eaten, induced fever. Taking the powder of *jamalgota* red berry was the way to get stools with blood in them. A thread dipped in a powder of the *rathi* bean and tied up in the wound would keep the wound raw and open for

months. Some have even swallowed crushed glass in the hope of inducing bloody stools. The desperate prisoners preferred such abuse of their body to the hard labor the authorities inflicted on them. But even these desperate measures wouldn't save the political prisoners from the unremitting hard labor—their proof of sickness was rarely accepted as valid.

Sunday talks today centered on Ullaskar; though weak, he had been forced to climb up and down a steep slope with two heavy water containers all day, every day, in the vicious sun. It was an entirely unnecessary job of watering an already level court, at Dundas Point, with a view to level it further. Finally he rebelled and refused pointblank to do the work. He was brought back to the jail and punished with standing handcuffs in the yard for eight days. On the very first day he became feverish; the sun slanting on his back aggravated his condition. But the powers that be were relentless. He was not relieved of his punishment. Result: Ullaskar's mind caved in. That fun-loving young man, ever ready to entertain with his mimicry and ventriloquism, was now a hollow shell.

The clock was ticking. Already, on April 28, 1912, Indubhushan Roy, another one of their compatriots, had committed suicide; now Ullaskar was down. Was it their turn next? Just how long would they survive these atrocities? How were they to pull through? There was such dark despair in every heart, but one voice, Savarkar's, was indefatigable in its encouragement to all.

"Do not despair so, brothers! We are *not* forgotten here. Our people are agitating to improve our lot here. We are the fuel in the steam engine of our freedom movement. We burn that the engine can move!"

"Does anyone care if we burn? What are we achieving by it? It is all a waste. Who will save Hindustan if all the patriots are incarcerated like this?" cried Ramcharanlal.

"By our plight more will be aroused, the love of Hindustan *will* spread, and it *will* be a national movement. Give it a few more years. Our Indian brethren, soldiers of liberty, will not

give up the cause just because we are trapped here. They will vanquish the enemy!"

"Do you really see such a future for India? Will our dream come true?"

"Most certainly it will! The British have sent us here to break our spirit. We cannot let them succeed! We will support each other, and the hard times will pass. That day will surely dawn when you will be honored. Statues will be raised to you here, in this very place that the British revile you. In the certain hour of freedom celebrations, our tears, our sacrifices, will be valuable symbols of victory!"

These words were like a breath of fresh air rushing over their anguished souls. If such crumbs of relief were to come his way, Keshu was determined to survive all else.

Come Monday, it was back to the kolu for Keshu. Barrie was now experiencing a certain loss of face for yielding. Was Pulakeshiraj laughing at him? Intolerable! With a view to cut him down to size, Barrie visited him in the workshop.

"You bombgolawala!" he said, his cigar waggling up and down. "Make a complaint about me to any superior and my word shall prevail. Mind you well!"

"Mr. Barrie, why do you call me a bombgolawala? I had nothing to do with any bomb."

"Ah ha!" Barrie smacked his baton on his palm. "You, too, like the others, would like to be called a babu or political prisoner, would you? Well, let me tell you, you fool; you are nothing of the kind. Vagrant wretches, scum of society—that is what you all are. Warder! If this scoundrel does not finish his work in time, cane his buttocks till they are bloody!"

What was there to say to this? It was the daily diet of life here.

Barrie did not spare Savarkar either. "Hey you, Savarkar! When will you lose your mind?"

"After you, surely!" quipped Savarkar.

But Barrie was determined to discomfit him. "Oh, but *you* have to suffer here for fifty years. How will you survive it? Two

life sentences one after the other!" he jeered. "You will have to take a second life to run it to the full!"

"Yes, indeed! But at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that the Government has subscribed to the Hindu doctrine of rebirth and disowned the Christian doctrine of resurrection for my sentencing!" Savarkar, never at a loss, left Barrie agape.

Four days later, Barrie came to Savarkar again and crowed gleefully, "Savarkar! Ullaskar is completely mad now! Just like Indubhushan. Beware!"

"Indubhushan did not lose his mind. You lie there!" retorted Savarkar. "But if he did, and Ullas is also going the same way, I ask you why? *Why* do they lose their mind here?"

"Why ask me? I have nothing to do with it!"

"There is only one reason, their sufferings in prison. You cannot deny it!"

Taken aback, Barrie was quick to backtrack. "But who told you Ullas is mad? He is only pretending."

"Why is he kept so isolated, then? Let us see him and judge for ourselves."

"Are you accusing me of lying?"

"Treat us fairly, Barrie. Put an end to all this suffering, or else we will have to go on strike. Even if we don't win against you, we will have exposed the injustice and defended our honor!"

Barrie walked away, pretending he hadn't heard.

Ullaskar got no relief in the hospital. Far from recovering, he continued to have convulsions and bouts of lockjaw. He was kept strictly isolated. Driven to agonizing desolation in his lucid moments, he tried to hang himself. Fortunately, he was rescued by a passing warder. But his case was desperate. Next morning, he got a visit from the Superintendent. The short, stocky, clean-shaven and blue-eyed Major Murray was now back from leave. A fair-minded man, unlike his substitute Captain Barker who had ordered the electric shocks, he was frank with Ullaskar.

"As a government servant here, I cannot countermand the orders of my superior. However, though I do not approve of your

revolutionary actions, I respect the fact that you act so for the freedom of your country. Why be cowardly and hang yourself? If you like, I can authorize your removal to the mental hospital."

Ullaskar agreed to go to the mental hospital on the island.

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For Keshu the days were passing by. The daily tribulations—a byword in life here—had to be swallowed any which way. The senseless pettiness of it all . . . ! Why the meals served in unrelieved weather? Why the inhuman restrictions on the use of the toilet facilities? Why the imposed silence? Surely the solitary confinement, other than the working hours—and sometimes those too—was in itself enough to make anyone lose their mind? Why the torturous, grinding physical labor—with fetters, manacles, and cross-bar[20] fetters freely thrown in as punishment? Why the smacking, thrashing, and insults from the warders? Why? Why? *Why?*

He blocked out all thoughts of his home and family—it only led to unbearable heartache and yearning. His heart's only solace now was the secret, stolen communication with the other political prisoners—a smile here, a word there. But the plight of some, Babarao especially, was much worse than the others. On the complaint of a warder, Savarkar and Babarao were forbidden from entering the gomati. Babarao could not make it to the Sunday meets anymore.

March 31: The prisoners were being relocated to different cells. This change, coming every two months or so, was a treat in the drab routine of prison life. Today, the unforeseen happened. A cry rang out from block 3 near the gomati.

"Snake! Snake!"

Island snakes were vicious and poisonous. In a trice, Babarao, who was standing near the entrance of his own

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20 Bar attached across the fetters on the feet to prevent legs from being put together.

block 2, quickly dashed there through the gomati. Grabbing the warder's stick, he killed the snake with a deadly blow. The warder, full of admiration, praised Babarao's prompt reflex to Barrie. Far, far from appreciating Babarao, Barrie punished him with seven days of manacles for flouting the express order of not entering the gomati! Everyone was shocked.

This was not the end of Babarao's plight. At night his recurring diarrhea made it imperative for him to use the toilet. The warder refused to let him use it out of hours; his piss-pot was already full. Babarao had to use the corner of his cell and spent the night very uncomfortably. Next morning, he pleaded with the sweeper, "Mangaram, please clean my cell. I am sorry. I could not help soiling it last night."

"Babarao, I dare not," said Mangaram, quaking. "The warder will hit me if he finds out."

"Please help, Mangaram. You know how to do it without the warder finding out. I am so sick."

"No, no, Babarao. I cannot. They have an eye on me today. Forgive me, but I cannot bear the beatings."

"I did not realize that. Of course you must do what is right for you. I'll survive—don't worry."

By the rules, Mangaram *had* to file a complaint. That brought Barrie up in a trice. He berated Babarao loudly: "Savarkar! How dare you soil your room? Is this how you Indians behave? Savages! That's what you are. What is your excuse? Same old dysentery? Why do you hang your head?"

Babarao was ashamed. What torture to have his misfortune announced to all! How could he help falling sick? What was the use of explaining? Barrie wouldn't believe him. Why give him opportunity to heap insults?

"I'll clean my room right now, Mr. Barrie," he said quietly.

For the offense of soiling the room, he was strung up in handcuffs in his cell. For the next few days Babarao was in purgatory. His diarrhea was now acute. Upright and chained, he helplessly relieved himself, soiling his legs and his clothes. Thus he hung for hours on end—in pain, in discomfort, with

flies hovering over his soiled body. Yet his punishment was not called off. Babarao sought solace in deep meditation. He was a true yogi by nature. Had he not felt obliged to stand in for Savarkar—when he was away in England—he would have renounced the worldly life. Oh, what peace there was to lose one's mind in deliberation of the Bhagavad Gita, the Yogavasishtha, and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda! Only by dissociating the mind from the body can torment be survived. By the end of the week Babarao was passing blood in his stools. Now Barrie had his proof. But no haste was made to transfer him to the hospital. Eventually he was taken, not to the hospital proper, but to the cells in block 1 reserved for hospital use. After only a brief respite, it was back to hard labor for him.
And life went on in the usual desolate pattern.

Chapter Three

April-July 1913

April 14: The new Chalan arrived. This was a breath of fresh air, for with it came news of the outside world. Three new political prisoners, Jyotirmay Roy, Pulin Das, and Nanigopal Mukherji joined the others. They were stationed in block 5. They, too, were yoked to the oil mill. On the second day itself, Nanigopal was subjected to the full glory of Barrie. While he sat in the hot, brilliant morning sunshine, Barrie came up to him.

"You! Is it day or night right now?"

"It is day, Mr. Barrie," replied Nani like a sane man.

"Day! I say it is night, completely dark. Warder, what do you say?"

"Sarkar,[21] it is so very dark. It has to be night!"

This was preposterous! The firebrand Nani, though only seventeen years old, was not going to put up with this lunacy.

"You are crazy, Mr. Barrie, plain crazy!"

The warder smacked his face, but Nani held his ground. Barrie berated him, "You scoundrel! You dare talk so to the God of this realm . . . !"

"And *you* are talking to a political prisoner. I demand that you show me respect!"

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21 Government official.

For his pains, Nani was given the severe punishment of cross-bar fetters. The warders harassed him at every turn, but he continued to speak out boldly against every atrocity.

"I have the right of speech and I will talk," he declared to one and all. "I don't care—give me bad food, give me punishment. But never, ever treat me with disrespect! I will not stand for it."

The others were admiring of his bold stance but worried. They knew how impossible it was for the will to hold out against an authority that knew no bounds and crossed all limits. Then Barrie decided that Nani was being spoiled and encouraged by his elders in block 5. He relocated him to block 3, in charge of one of the meanest warders. Nani was enraged and refused to work. He was punished with standing handcuffs.

The others were now seriously planning a strike. The plan was almost ready when catastrophe struck. On April 24, Savarkar fell into Barrie's clutches. He had written instructions in a letter on how the strike was to be organized. All of a sudden warders were coming to search his cell. Savarkar tossed the letter out, but it was found. Fortunately, it was written in the seventeenth-century Modi script. Barrie could not read it, so had no way of knowing what was in the letter or who wrote it. No one was willing to depose against Savarkar. Nevertheless, the case went before Murray. Barrie got a Bengali clerk to declare that the note was written in Bengali. Barin stepped forward to give evidence that it was not.

"Damn me, sir, if a single Bengali alphabet appears in this letter!"

"Sir! This is an outrage!" shouted Barrie, unhampered by honesty. "He lies! These men are conspiring to keep the truth out. The clerk can read the note to you, sir. That will give you all the proof you need!"

The clerk did a magnificent, extempore job of reading a fictitious account from the note, implicating Savarkar in organizing a full-scale hunger strike. The clerk was believed. Savarkar was sentenced to being manacled for one week. He did not rest there. He filed a petition with Chief Commissioner

Douglas, complaining against the false evidence. Upon looking into the matter, Douglas replied that there was perfect truth in what Savarkar said. There was not an alphabet of Bengali in the letter. Murray was enraged. Barrie came into an official scolding, but that was all. The clerk was dismissed.

When embarrassed before the political prisoners like this, Barrie placated them with loosening the rules slightly. So organizing the strike became easier. But unfortunately, there was still no relief for Nani. The tougher the warders got the more recalcitrant Nani became. They hung him in manacles; he gave up washing his clothes. They put him in the punishment gunny suit; he gave up wearing clothes. They knocked him on the ground and stitched the clothes on him; he tore them off at night. Thereafter it was shackles on hand and foot for him. Somehow, he broke the chains in the night. The next day, in rebellion he refused to speak or stand up before the officers. Back to day and night solitary confinement he went; so he refused to come out at all, not even for a bath! He was lifted, chained and stark naked, and taken to the reservoir. Here he was forcibly bathed by the sweepers until his skin was scrubbed raw and bloody with the coir. The warders stood around watching the spectacle, abusing him in vulgar language, but Nani was not cowed. He wandered around stark naked. They then took away one of his blankets, so he threw away the other.

This was a royal battle of wills—Nani versus the Andaman authority.

Finally, the Chief Commissioner visited him personally. "Nanigopal, this has gone far enough! It needs to stop now. What are you hoping to achieve?"

"Sir"—Nani lifted his chin proudly—"all I want is to be recognized as a political prisoner, to be treated with respect. It is my right!"

What effrontery from a traitor to the empire! The Chief Commissioner came right out with it. "You think you can melt our hearts, frighten us, or compel us with this behavior? You are mistaken. We do not care if you die. Believe it!"

The situation remained unresolved. In desperation, the superior officers felt inclined to consider Barrie's application to cane Nani, even though Lord Morley[22] had expressly forbidden the caning of political prisoners.

Barrie was quick to crow to Savarkar. "Hey, Savarkar, what say you now? I will have Nani caned! You think you can do as you like here? Here—in my realm!"

"Mr. Barrie, I warn you. If you cane Nani, the consequences will be terrible. We will resort to violence! No more civil disobedience. Think well before you make that move," Savarkar blazed.

But Barrie paid no heed. The frame was set up on May 15. Every political prisoner was rounded up and kept chained in his cell. They waited helplessly, desperately afraid of hearing Nani's piercing cry. But all was silent. A warder stopped by to tell Savarkar that Nani was moved to another place. A little later another stopped by and cruelly told him, "Your beloved Nani has been ripped into two by us."

Savarkar's heart almost stopped beating, but he answered calmly, "It is nothing of the sort. Nani has not been touched, only moved elsewhere." He prayed this was the truth.

It was. There was some humanity left in the superior officers. None would execute the final order. Nani was transferred to the Viper Island. The political prisoners heaved a big collective sigh of relief. But Nani himself was severely disappointed; he wanted to show the authorities his mettle. If they expected him to weaken, away from the others, they were doomed to disappointment. Nani went on a hunger strike.

The others were almost ready for their strike. The general plan was refusal to work. Savarkar was always against a hunger strike.

"How does it help to starve the body? Instead," he advocated, "eat as much as you can. Get fat but do not work. Those who are expecting their letter any day should join the strike after they have it in hand."

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22 Secretary of State for India, 1905-1910, 1911.

Their one annual letter from home was too precious to forfeit!

Savarkar and Keshu argued over the strike.

"But, Tatyarao, I must support everyone," Keshu expostulated. "Why should I stay away from the strike?"

"Keshu, you are only sixteen years old. Your mind and body are still tender. They have been grinding you on the kolu, moreover."

"Tatyarao, I am as strong as an ox. Besides, see how well Nani is holding up. He is young too."

"I do not want you to go Nani's way!" Savarkar retorted. "He is very highly strung and on a spiral that may lead to his death. Is that what you want for yourself? It needs a mature mind to have the rationale to call a halt. It does not reflect adversely on your bravery and patriotism if you refrain. I, too, am going to wait for my letter first."

Despite the censorship, Savarkar's letter from home contained all kinds of information critical to his overall plan.

But Keshu was not done arguing. "Tatyarao—"

"Keshu," said Savarkar, raising his pointer finger, "I command you, as your leader, to stay away!" That was that.

A petition underlying all the unfair treatment coupled with the ultimatum "No relief and no concession, then no work" was sent to the Chief Commissioner forthwith; as always it was duly disregarded. With desperate resolve, the strike began. Not to be behindhand, the authorities, equally determined, were ready to squash it. Punishment after punishment was doled out. They were all kept in strict solitary confinement in block 5 to restrict their communication. Whereas before they had pretended to follow the no-talking rule, now they started shouting out loud to each other. The full array of weapons—manacles, fetters, and cross-bar fetters—were pulled out of the armory and used to bind them. Many resisted this by squatting or lying down, just to make it more difficult for the authorities. They were starved or kept on a reduced diet, but the strike did not break.

One and all refused to stand up in Barrie's presence, not willing to accord him *any* respect. Three warders were not enough to force them to do so. They had also taken to being as rude as possible to Barrie, much to his discomfort. He took it in his head that the political prisoners impressed the convicts because they spoke in English.

"You bombgolawalas! I order you to speak in Hindi. You think you can be big bosses by talking English? Ha!"

Ramcharan was quick to retort in Hindi, "Barrie, English is not the language of the gods to us. We use it for your convenience. We are proud to speak in our mother tongue. More shame to you that you do not speak in Irish, your native language."

The convicts had a hearty laugh at Barrie's expense as they understood Hindi!

Ramcharan, Hotilal, Ladha Ram, and Ram Hari were extremely sharp-witted and had an excellent command of Hindi. Barrie was no match for them in a battle of wits. To his polite queries they would reply in highfalutin' language; he could never hope to grasp that! If he was rude, they had in their repertoire the most vulgar and crude vocabulary as well. Their satire, innuendo, and brutal frankness had him utterly confounded.

"You . . . you . . . ," Barrie sputtered. "Slaves . . . that's what you Indians are . . . just *slaves*!"

The reply was prompt. "If we are slaves, we are slaves of the British Empire, not yours. Strange, that *you* should regard it as your own. Doesn't England hold Ireland in subjugation? It enslaves you, an Irishman, as much as it enslaves us!"—*what, Jailorsaheb, a slave . . . !* All the convicts were agog—"yet see how you wag your tail for them? Barking at us just because *we* do not recognize it as our own!"

The convicts burst out laughing; the reality of "God" Barrie was thoroughly exposed. Utterly routed, Barrie decided to rescind his order.

"English, speak English! No more of your Hindi will do," he screamed.

"Make us!" jeered Ramcharan. "Make us!"

So went on the battle of wills.

Nanigopal, too, had been brought back to the Cellular Jail, still on a continuous hunger strike. He was being force-fed milk by tubes through the nose. This was very painful and dangerous too; it could flood the lungs. Nani was past caring.

Nothing was breaking the strike. The situation in the jail was explosive and headed for disaster. Only caning was not yet used, though threatened. But the strikers welcomed that too. Desperate, Murray advised the Chief Commissioner to make an offer of light work on the outside for most of the political prisoners. When it was brought before them, Ramcharan was strongly opposed to this compromise.

"This offer is a joke! They are not even going to send all of us out. We have to stand proud as men. Reject their offer!"

Babarao, too, was not prepared to give up. "We must be firm upon our resolve. What use is it going on strike otherwise? They are trying to split us."

Savarkar did not agree. He was looking at the bigger picture. "Working outside is the only way to get reprieve. Opportunity lies outside these walls! We must grab it, even if it is not for all. It is better than what we have now," he reasoned. "They give a little, we give a little—then we wait for developments. If we are not happy, we can always strike again."

The officers, wisely, approached them one by one. Much to Ramcharan's disgust, the strike was called off. Only he and Nani still refused to work. He got no more of the soft talk. Murray flatly told him, "If you do not commence work, the Magistrate will add a year to your punishment."

"That's fine with me. Go ahead, what is one more year in the ten I have already?"

"It is not just one year. We will keep on adding the years. The count could go to fifty years too," threatened Murray.

"Oh, is that so? Tatyarao will be happy to know he will have company!"

"You are half-mad, Ramcharan!" Murray was quite at a loss. "It is no use talking to you."

But Ramcharan did start work soon too. There was no point in standing out alone.

Besides Savarkar, who was considered dangerous element number 1, eight other political prisoners were not allowed to go outside: Babarao and Wamanrao, his confidants; Hotilal and Ramcharan, the arrogant daredevils; Keshu, Jyotirmay, and Pulin who had not joined the strike; and Nanigopal who, of course, was still on his hunger strike.

Savarkar at once appealed his decision. "Major Murray, why am I not allowed to work outside?"

"Savarkar, your previous history stands in the way of that."

"Major Murray, in what way is *my* history different . . . ! I did not even participate in the strike."

"Savarkar, participated or not, you were the ring leader—the main instigator of that strike."

"Is it just to accuse me without proof?" queried Savarkar reasonably. "Anyway, you have sent the actual strikers outside. I, who only approved, am still in here. What injustice . . . ! Where is your British code of fairness?"

"Savarkar," Murray stirred restlessly, unable to look Savarkar in the eye. "It is useless to argue with me. The Government of India refuses to let you out of these walls."

But Savarkar continued to make petitions. It was vital to get this concession, for World War I was hovering in the air just as he had predicted. *That* was the ideal opportunity to organize a revolution to free his motherland, his beloved Hindustan. Working on the outside gave limitless opportunities for escape. And Savarkar burned to be free.

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Savarkar's much-awaited letter was confiscated. This was infuriating. In Ireland the Government had taken no steps to punish those who openly rebelled and raised an army on the soil

of Britain itself, while Savarkar, whose only proven crime was supplying twenty pistols, was given fifty years transportation. Keir Hardie had criticized this disparity in treatment in the Parliament in London. The letter contained this news. Barrie, convinced it would encourage the political prisoners, kept the letter back.

Keshu now had the lighter job of "picking oakum," rope-making from coir. The first day he sat down in front of a bundle of coir, quite in despair. How was he going to turn that mass into a rope? Four warders were acting as tutors. They had to first roll a bit of the coir until it formed a wick. When a huge pile of wicks was ready, two wicks had to be plaited together with skillful fingers to make the rope, adding more wicks as you came to the end. Problem was—where to get those skillful fingers? After much huffing and puffing, Keshu's rope was ready. But no matter how much he tried, Barrie was never satisfied; the rope was too loose, too thick, or too thin. Even this relatively easy job was difficult when one had no flair for it!

On the outside, the political prisoners worked secretly to spread the love of their motherland. Savarkar had a plan of action set up: circulating poems and articles; organizing secret meetings; and making conversations encouraging patriotism in the free locals, second generation of the lifers. The plan was working! A handful of patriots, living in dire straits, worked a miracle.

Within the jail, the authorities had loosened the no-talking rule to keep them away from strikes. Murray had a lot to do with these relaxed rules. The Sunday meet had turned into a regular session. Discussions abounded, and the session ended with *bhajans*.[23] Many convicts, too, were inspired to join in.

The rule about books was relaxed. All their books were stored in one cabinet; they could now be shared. Savarkar

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23 Songs of worship.

introduced a full-scale teaching program for the political prisoners, though not without opposition!

"Tatyarao, why do we need to read books for pure knowledge? We are men of action! Such reading is a bore," they complained.

"Brothers, knowledge without action is lame, of course, but action without knowledge is blind!" Savarkar argued patiently. "Winning freedom is hard enough, but it is harder still to retain it. Heroism is not enough. If you aspire to political leadership, you *must* widen your wisdom and be knowledgeable in subjects like politics, economics, and constitutional history. Or else you are unfit for responsible self-government!"

As they digested this, he finished with a rider: "Why should we waste our time here? That would be sheer folly and shortsightedness. Let us occupy ourselves usefully rather than be rotting here in despondency."

Such talk from Savarkar was very inspiring, and many of them did do well. Savarkar also insisted that everyone must learn to read and write Hindi, the national language of India, and any other Indian language besides their own.

For Keshu, Savarkar's guidance was a godsend. He had a love of learning but was self-taught. It amazed him just how much knowledge Savarkar had at his fingertips. He was well versed not only in Indian history from ancient times but also in that of Europe and America. He had even talked to them about Assyria, Babylonia, and Nebuchadnezzar, its famous king! Keshu had never heard of these before.

Best of all, he heard the history of the Indian War of Independence of 1857 from his guru himself. It was Savarkar's book on it that had inspired him to become a patriot. That book—so dangerous was it considered—had been banned by the Indian government even before publication! Savarkar didn't let trifles like that get in his way, of course. He had contrived, dodging the police hot on his heels in London, to get the book published in Holland and smuggled it into India anyway.

Forty-five days had gone by; Nani was still on strike. He was kept in strict isolation from the others. His brother had come over from the mainland to plead with him to break his fast—but in vain. Nani was reduced to skin and bones. The situation was grave.

In desperation, Savarkar came up with a ploy; much against his beliefs and principles, he declared a hunger strike too. This news spread like wildfire. Everyone was aghast. The Chief Commissioner had had enough. As much trouble as Savarkar was to them, for him to lose his life here would be a catastrophe. This nonsense had to stop! Savarkar was hauled before the court for this offence.

"Mr. Savarkar," said the Magistrate sharply, "we urge you strongly to break this fast. Such irresponsible behavior does not behoove you."

"Sir, mine is only a sympathy fast. It is the one thing that may convince Nani to break his. Permit me to talk to him."

The permission was granted. Barrie took Savarkar to Nani's cell. He lay there, limp but adamant.

"Nani," said Savarkar gently.

Feebly Nani turned to him, not quite able to believe his eyes.

"Tatyarao . . ."

"I have decided to join you in fasting, Nani."

"Oh no, Tatyarao, you cannot do that. Your principles . . . ! And they will punish you too!" Nani was aghast.

"For you, I will willingly do it."

Nani looked at him entreatingly, stretching out a feeble hand. Quickly moving forward away from Barrie, Savarkar took Nani's hand in his own and squatted by his head.

"Die a soldier's death, Nani!" Savarkar whispered urgently in his ears. "Don't waste away—*don't* be weak like a woman!"

Even in his depleted state, the words affected Nani powerfully. To be thought as weak as a woman was the very worst fate for any revolutionary, at any time. That *Savarkar* should think it of him . . . ! *Never!* It broke his resolve.

"Never that, Tatyarao, never *ever* . . . ! Bring me some food." Savarkar heaved a sigh of relief.

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Jyotirmay needed to answer nature's call—in the middle of the working day! What to do? With Ramcharan's encouragement he ventured to use the toilet. Unfortunately, he was caught and hauled before Barrie.

"You wretch . . . ! How dare you break my rule! No wasting working hours to use the toilet. Have you not understood that yet?" demanded Barrie in Hindi.

Jyotirmay's command over Hindi was feeble at best. "Sir . . . sir . . ."

"Speak up, speak up. I haven't all day!"

His experiences here having cowed him completely, poor Jyotirmay sought refuge in Ramcharan's strong presence.

"Ramcharan . . . he said . . . he . . ."

"Ha!" Barrie pounced. "Now I *got* him, that daredevil! Warder, bring him here!"

Ramcharan was brought before Barrie. At once a report was slapped on him: "Inciting a prisoner to mutinous conduct." Being quite another kettle of fish from Jyotirmay, Ramcharan retaliated by giving his explanation in pure Hindi; Barrie was confounded. Immediately, another report was dashed off: "Using impertinent and abusive language to the jailer." Fortunately, despite Barrie's best efforts, Murray believed Ramcharan's truthful account of the incident and he was given no punishment.

Nandagopal had also complained about the atrocious hygiene to a visiting high official. Barrie, of course, started to scream and shout at this, but Nandagopal held his ground.

"Sir, you only have to come and sniff our cells to see the truth of my words. Your nose shall be my witness."

The official remonstrated with Barrie severely for mismanagement of his prison. The restriction on the use of the toilet was eased too.

There was now a regular flow of news in and out of the Cellular Jail. By this time, the political prisoners were very well respected by the other convicts. Many of the warders, petty officers, and clerks had been won over and were secretly helping them. Any news that came to the office was sure to reach them almost immediately. The Chalan was a good source of news too. Upon suspicion, some of these convicts were stripped. But the messages still came through; sometimes written on the back of the "ticket" where no one thought to check, or sometimes verbally passed. A Gujarati convict, Maganbhai, whom they called "postman," was their staunchest ally in passing notes. He hid the chits in the shreds of the coconut shells and took them from one to the other. The political prisoners also scratched messages on leaves with thorns or on their water pot with pieces of brick. They were inventive. The authorities were very frustrated, for they never could figure out who was doing it and how!

Chapter Four

August-December 1913

August 22: Murray informed Savarkar that come Monday he would be working outside. Savarkar was elated. Would they let Babarao work outside too? Had their fortune really turned? Now he could escape! *O Mother India, here I come,* thought Savarkar. He memorized all his compositions—he was a prolific writer and poet—written on the walls and waited for Monday to dawn.

Monday morning came—and went. Neither Savarkar nor Babarao were among those sent out to work. They waited and waited *and* waited. On Wednesday, a shamefaced Murray informed Savarkar that there was a hitch in the plan as the Chief Commissioner had gone to Rangoon. They would have to await his return.

Far from giving concessions, upon the Chief Commissioner's return on Thursday there was a large-scale campaign of arrests. Every political prisoner was gathered from the outside and brought into the jail. All were locked up in their cells, some even manacled. A search party, of European officers only, ruthlessly proceeded to search the whole colony, leaving fear and nervousness in their wake. The reason for this leaked out soon enough.

Information had reached the authorities that a bomb factory was started on the island. This was a disaster for the Government . . . ! The most diligent search yielded no concrete

proof of this claim. However, some suspicious items were found. When you had a leader like Savarkar in your jail, with so many compatriots convicted in bombing cases roaming outside on the island, even this slight evidence was enough to throw the Government into a tizzy. There was a furious spate of government letters from the mainland to the Andaman. This experiment of sending political prisoners here had certainly not worked in their favor!

Mr. Craddock, Home Member of the Government of India, wrote: "I am very ready to believe that these prisoners are utterly impertinent and have used the liberty allowed to them by amusing themselves by a fresh bomb conspiracy. With the facilities that exist in the islands for smuggling, and the criminals abounding galore to act as agents and abettors, there is every reason to suppose that they would have succeeded. It seems very impotent to let them go unpunished except by way of jail discipline, but I certainly do not contemplate with equanimity the unwarranted publicity this would ensue. Last thing we need is to bring these prisoners in the limelight again in India."

Mr. Teggart of the Bengal police visited the islands to make inquiries but made no appreciable headway. No one opened their lips, and the bomb scare was cloaked in secrecy and silence. He sent a telegram to the Director of Criminal Intelligence, on October 23, 1913: "Have discussed with Hutchinson. We think it is doubtful if a case can be established under section 120-A at this stage."

Mr. Craddock would have to visit the islands himself to draw up a plan of action.

Meanwhile, all the concessions granted to the political prisoners were withdrawn forthwith. Savarkar was categorically told: here you'll stay inside the Cellular Jail until you die or your fifty years are up. It was a staggering death blow to his aspirations to free India. There was only one way to get out now—make petition after petition promising exemplary behavior. *Perhaps* the authorities would believe him and set him free?

Savarkar was a firm believer in Shivaji's[24] precept of manipulating a powerful enemy any which way, especially from a position of great weakness. These were days of extreme anxiety and apprehension. Then tragedy struck. Kalicharan Ghosh succumbed to untreated malaria. Enough was enough! They all filed a petition; either they should be charged—for the crime of bomb-making, for planning escape, or for inciting the public—or this unfair treatment brought back upon them must end!

Craddock duly arrived. He listened to a few political prisoners in their cells and had private interviews with others. But he was uninterested in tales of woe. His interview with Savarkar was not very satisfactory either. Craddock opened it by saying in apparent concern, "Savarkar, what is this plight you have reduced yourself to? With your brains and talents you would have become an important government official. Look at your wretched condition!"

"I am grateful for your kind wishes, sir, but it is entirely in your hands to relieve me of my wretchedness!" replied Savarkar promptly. "Anyway, if it is true that all the progressive legislations proposed by Mr. Gokhale[25] are going to be passed, I assure you, all my friends and I will be happy to turn to the path of peace."

Craddock at once pounced. "Ah ha! How can you speak for your friends? Are you in touch with them?"

"How is that possible?" asked Savarkar, unruffled. "Here I am under watch and guard in solitary confinement. We know each other's mind; that's all. I repeat, if progressive measures are taken by the Government, we will give up the violence."

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24 Shivaji Bhosale (February 19, 1630-April 30, 1680): a Maratha warrior, who dreamed of an independent Hindu State and founded it in the face of a strong opposition from Muslim Sovereigns ruling whole of India. His royal title: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

25 Gopal Krishna Gokhale (May 9, 1866-February 19, 1915): a Moderate Indian leader.

"Hmm! I do not know about that. They are still advocating terrorism and swear by you. In India and America plans are being hatched by secret societies and revolutionaries."

"I am hearing that for the first time," said Savarkar, exuding innocence. "How can I prevent them from calling me a leader? I am so far away over here."

And so the two well-matched adversaries played with each other, back and forth. Craddock tried to wrap it up. "All right, all right, Savarkar, if your views are changed as you claim, I will permit you to write a letter to that effect."

"I shall be very happy to do so, if I can send it uncensored."

"It must go through me, at the very least!"

"That won't do at all! They will, surely, suspect duress. Independence in mailing the letter is a must."

"I cannot permit that at all!"

"Well," said Savarkar, eyes glinting, "then what would be the point of writing it?"

Realizing that a stalemate had been reached, Craddock quickly digressed into a discussion of history.

He soon left the island, and the usual round of bureaucratic letter writing was commenced again. His report stated unequivocally: "I am convinced that the collection of these dangerous men in one place is wrong, and the correct policy would be to scatter them over the jails in India and Burma. It is impossible to allow them to enjoy the same privileges as the ordinary convict. In the case of Savarkar, it is impossible to give him any liberty here at all; so important a leader is he that the European section of the Indian anarchists will certainly organize his escape from any jail. Even from the island it is easy to escape; just charter a steamer and with plying money the rest is easy. For him hard labor within the Cellular Jail is the only option. Most of the others can be safely transferred to other jails and kept separated from each other. The amount of mischief they can do individually is not a patch on the mischief they can create united. The ones left behind should be offered the chance of a simple imprisonment upon good conduct. Even a man like Savarkar can only be kept at hard labor for so long." The fate of the political prisoners was determined along

these broad lines and then the ironing out of the details was commenced.

1914

The political prisoners did their best to wait patiently for the results of Craddock's visit. After their brief respite, it was difficult to get back to the previous restrictions. Soon there was talk of another strike. Savarkar was willing. The North Indians were raring to go, but some of the Bengalis were prevaricating. *Will this strike trickle to an end like the previous one?* they wondered. Fed up with this oscillating Barin declared, "We will go ahead with the strike as we do have a majority; those who won't join will be considered traitors!"

The severity of these uncompromising words galvanized everybody into action. No one wanted to be thought a traitor! Only two were forced to stay away: Nanigopal, as he had with great difficulty come to grips with the jail routine, and Keshu, because he was a minor. Feeling quite like a traitor, Keshu argued hotly but in vain. Everyone was unanimous on that count.

This strike came as a shock to the authorities. What a poor return for their generosity . . . ! Were they not working on a plan to send these prisoners back to mainland India? Unfortunately, the prisoners themselves were not apprised of this treat, so the merry partying started again—the strikers refusing to work and the authorities immediately mobilizing the by now oh-so-familiar mass arrests.

Everyone was locked up in cells spaced very far apart. Some were chained to the wall in manacles, and others in fetters. Communication between the strikers would have utterly broken down had they, very smartly, not prepared for this eventuality. All through the day they jangled their chains to a code, like a Morse code, that Savarkar had worked out. Pretty soon Babarao modified the code and converted it to Hindi. Now it was almost impossible for the warders to understand what was going on.

"Hey!" they would say. "Stop the racket! Why do you bang your chains?"

"We are only keeping beat to the songs we hum in our mind" would be the stock reply.

Eventually they did figure it out. Barrie was hopping mad. He shouted and screamed that it should all stop. The warders did their best, but which striker was going to heed them? The strike was all about civil disobedience, and the clanging continued unimpaired.

They were only taken out of their cells for the meals and a bath. The silence rule was extremely strictly enforced. For two days silence reigned supreme. On the third day it was broken by a pronouncement: "Brethren, we are free!"

Everyone turned in shock to see who spoke. It was the irrepressible Nani!

"We are born free. It is our right to speak with love and kindness to one another. We cannot be deprived of this"—hurriedly, Mirza Khan and another warder pounced on him and forcibly carried him away—"we must challenge it!"

Undaunted, Nani was continuing his discourse! The others could still hear him propounding it long after he was locked up. Barrie's anger knew no bounds. He was dancing with rage. No one could stop laughing. Hereafter the silence rule was tossed out too.

Later, Mirza Khan came before Savarkar to sound him out with a little buttering. Mirza, tall and thickset, with big jowls and a flaming red beard, was the very worst warder, and that was saying plenty!

"Badababu, that Nanigopal is your true disciple!" he said in apparent admiration, stroking his beard. "So very loyal, so bold! Truly, he is just like a Pathan!"

Savarkar ruthlessly cut Mirza's pretensions. "Mirza, *you* are a Pathan. Nanigopal is a born Hindu and a brave one for it. If he were a Pathan he would be licking Barrie's shoes now, like you, instead of rotting in jail!"

Mirza beat a hasty retreat.

The authorities were at their wits' end. All the strikers were hauled before the magistrate, chain gang for six months was imposed, caning was threatened; but no one let up. Murray sent an application to the mainland to hold back the orders for these men. It went against the grain to reward such men!

By dint of complex paperwork the plan of repatriation of the political prisoners was finalized. To change this would require more time and more paperwork. The Government was in a quandary. Just in time, Craddock reminded them that repatriation was not a reward to these prisoners but an absolute national priority for the Government!

Finally, it was communicated to all that most of them would be leaving. Ones left behind were the lifers: Savarkar, Babarao, Wamanrao, Barinkumar, Hem Chandra, Upendranath, Sureshchandra, Keshu, and Pulin Das. Several concessions were made to them at this time. Better food and toilet facilities, books to read, and other such demands were granted. The Bengalis were allowed to cook their own food and were given better jobs. They were paid an allowance, meager in itself, but riches to one who has not seen any money in years. Babarao and Wamanrao had to wait a while to get their permission to cook. So had Keshu and Pulin, for they had not been there long.

For Savarkar it was back to the old grind. As Barrie cruelly told him, "Savarkar, you are the father of unrest in the Andaman. You will be given no quarter and shown no mercy. Rot within these walls!"

That indomitable spirit was back in his solitary cell, making the inevitable ropes. He stood at his cell entrance, apparently relaxed and enjoying the twilight colors visible from his corner cell—but the clenched fists gripping the barred door, those magnetic eyes leaping with the fire raging in his breast, told their tale. What a truly hapless creature he was, caged here within these walls when a major war was about to brew! *Oh, how those mighty waves crashing on the beach beckon the heart! There—there lies the path of escape. But not for me, no, not*

for me! How is this gnawing desire, this overpowering sense of urgency, consuming the heart and soul to be contained in this frail and weak mortal body of mine? A shuddering sob racked his frame, jerking him to the awareness of the tears streaming down his cheeks.

This was his life now and for a long, *long* time to come: only shattered dreams and a daily grind; only *hearing* the enticing call of the ocean; only seeing that piece of sky, those few trees, and this bit of yard, if that—day in day out, year after year.

Oh, how will I fulfill my oath to bring honor to my Hindustan? Oh to be free—to break those chains that bind you, O Mother, to bring honor back to your name, to vanquish those who enslave you. Oh Mother India . . . !

The crushing sense of loneliness and desolation was absolute. But his monumental will would not long let him mope in despair. *The self is torn to pieces, but wake up, O my Soul, wake up! Be ready for repeated sacrifice,* he urged himself. *Hope of escape is dashed forever! Dream not of might-have-beens! That is a fruitless pastime.* He brought to mind his own poem, *Strength of the Soul,* to remind himself how indomitable was his soul.

Without beginning nor end am I. Inviolable am I.
Vanquish me? In this world no such enemy is born!
A sword cannot slice me nor can fire burn me,
Craven Death itself shall flee in fear of me!
And yet, O Foolish Foe,
By fear of Death you dare to scare *me*!

Even here in this hellhole his people needed him. It was time for action.

Chapter Five

1914

With the relaxed rules, Savarkar restarted the education program for the political prisoners. But why stop with them? So many of the convicts were illiterate; Savarkar decided that the political prisoners must slowly advance them toward literacy. The materials, paid for out of their allowance, were smuggled into the jail; books were ordered from home. So, by the conniving of several people inside and outside the jail, the literacy program was launched. As they say, you can take the horse to the water, but how to make him drink?

"What is the use of reading and writing? It only makes Jailersaheb angry. No, badebabu, we don't want to do it" was the common refrain from the convicts.

Savarkar insisted that the teachers persevere. No task worth doing comes about easily. Some of the convicts they outright bribed with *succa*, a pinch of the treasured tobacco, the currency of the jail; others they tempted by visions of better jobs in the prison. A few made an effort to please them; fewer still wanted to learn genuinely. Many took to completely avoiding them! It was all *very* painful for the political prisoners. On top of the daily work to be hammering away at the heads of their ignorant, unwilling pupils who were either thieves, murderers, or dacoits . . . ! One and all wanted to give up. Just *who* would convince Savarkar?

Finally, they approached Savarkar together. Keshu voiced their thoughts. "Er . . . Tatyarao, this is such a thankless job. The convicts are not interested in learning. Why should we not leave it alone?"

"So! You think you are wasting your time, do you, Keshu?"—Savarkar frowned forbiddingly and Keshu quailed—"why do we fight for resolutions to be passed to establish schools, especially free ones? And surely someone must come forward to teach in them? Perhaps you think we are special? Hard work and drudgery must be the lot of some unfortunate?"

Poor Keshu tried to put in a word. "No, no, Tatyarao—"

But Savarkar swept on, unrelenting, "Real and faithful national work"—his fiery gaze passed over them all—"*must* begin with the uplift of the unfortunate and the downtrodden. Education will open the windows of their soul upon the world. How else can they learn about their country, their people? For us there is no better job here. To waste one's time in idle brooding and fruitless discussion"—he looked pointedly at Keshu, who was ready to sink through the ground—"is worse than this drudgery. We shall persevere at this. That's it!"

It was Savarkar's tenacious will that spanned the chasm between the unwilling pupils and their equally unwilling teachers. But gradually, people with sterling qualities devoted to the national cause arose from this degenerate class of convicts.

Savarkar decided to establish a formal library in the jail. Barrie, of course, opposed this. He threatened to personally burn any books that had notations and marks in the margins not belonging to the owner. This was not an idle threat; Barrie was at war with books. Savarkar approached Murray directly. At first, Murray was skeptical.

"Major Murray," reasoned Savarkar, "every prison has a government library. We are not allowed access to it. Now we wish to provide one at our expense. Why should it be difficult to grant our request?"

"Hmm . . . you have something there, Savarkar." But Murray was still doubtful.

"Why not take a vote to see who wants a library?" Savarkar asked. "As for Mr. Barrie, if he wants to satisfy his urge to burn books, he may burn mine."

Fortunately, Barrie's threats did not keep any one from voting in its favor. Murray acceded to the library. Barrie, of course, far from rising to Savarkar's challenge, forbore from burning anyone's books. They all pooled their resources, so they had a good collection. Savarkar made lists of books, which they ordered in turn. Now they regularly had a parcel to look forward to. Some books they had in duplicate and triplicate. Soon they had a collection of books in Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Sanskrit, and Marathi plus current magazines and newspapers—a very well-stocked library!

One Sunday, Keshu, Savarkar's most devout pupil, missed the class. That was odd. Later, Savarkar found him behind the workshop wall clutching a paper, tears rolling down his cheeks. He was very concerned. "Keshu! What is wrong?"

Much embarrassed, Keshu jumped up hastily wiping his cheeks. "Tatyarao, I have received a letter. Imagine—a letter of my own!" He clutched the precious paper to his heart. No treasure could compete with it for value.

"Wonderful, Keshu! Who is it from?"

"It is from my lawyer, Barrister Madhavrao Phadke," said Keshu, avoiding Savarkar's eyes, for even to him he had not disclosed the truth. "He is going to write to me as I have no family. He asks if he can send me anything. Tatyarao, please give me a list of books to order. Now I, too, can help our cause here materially!"

Savarkar was looking at him with penetrating eyes. Keshu was sure he had guessed the truth.

"I am so glad, Keshu. This connection to our homeland is very precious." He smiled. "I am going to leave you alone so your heart can soar over these walls and fly over the ocean to meet your dear ones. To their credit, the authorities have not—yet—jailed our dreams!"

Keshu caught his hand as he turned to leave. "Tatyarao, I . . . I . . ."

Savarkar patted his hand. "It is all right, Keshu, I know the value of keeping secrets."

"No, I must tell you; it is only right. Tatyarao, my real name is Keshav Wadkar and I am not seventeen years old." Keshu was talking in a low voice and in Marathi besides, so he was sure of not being overheard.

"Keshu . . . ! Just how old are you, then?"

"Fifteen."

"*So* young . . . I didn't guess that . . . too young for the Andaman." Savarkar shook his head regretfully. "Perhaps, we had better sit down."

Savarkar sat leaning back against the workshop wall. Keshu sat forward, hands around his knees.

"Why did you not keep your real age, Keshu? They may not have sent you here then."

"We thought it better not to—for safety's sake; if caught, it would make it harder to identify me, so we hoped. I *did* want to keep my nickname, though."

"That was very brave of you, Keshu." *O Mother India,* thought Savarkar with pride, *with sons like Keshu we will surely get freedom soon . . .*

Keshu was proud to hear such words from Savarkar. Now to tell him the rest of the story—it was not easy to find the words. His fingers plucked at the grass.

"And who is Madhavrao . . . ?" asked Savarkar encouragingly.

"He is my uncle, Tatyarao." Oh, what a relief . . . ! To *finally* say it aloud—especially to Tatyarao! Now Keshu's words were tumbling out. "His son, Damu, was the assassin of Glencowrie. Since he was twelve he has been inspired by you. Freeing Hindustan was all he thought about. I wish you could have met him! He . . . he has died . . . . I don't know for sure . . . but . . . I *know* it in my bones"—tears of sorrow shimmered in his eyes—"I tried so hard to save him . . ."

"He has become a martyr of Mother India. He is immortal!" Savarkar avowed. "Life is a grim battle for men like us, Keshu. But in our sacrifice lies the salvation of our beloved Hindustan. Soon, Keshu, soon the whole of Hindustan will be agitating for freedom . . ."

There was a faraway look in his eyes. The dream he dreamed every moment, with every pounding heartbeat—the unfurling of the flag of independent India on the peak of the Himalaya—was flashing before his eyes.

The coarse shout of the warder brought him back to reality. It was time to be locked up in the cell for the rest of the day.

* * *

Barrie liked to tease Savarkar with false news or derogatory comments about his family and friends. This made his soul burn and mind so very restless. *I have neither taken this vow blindly, nor to win popularity and fame. I have taken it prepared to burn myself in the freedom pyre, just like a Sati,*[26] he reminded himself.

"Savarkar, who is Har Dayal?" asked Barrie.

"He is the man your Government calls the revolutionary leader in America," Savarkar replied.

"Well, his days are numbered. He is brought to Bombay to face a murder charge."

Savarkar was shattered. He had none of his usual comebacks to squash Barrie. Lala Har Dayal was a close friend, a key figure in the revolutionary movement. His arrest would be a disaster for the freedom of India. He sent his trusted warders to get the real news, not trusting Barrie at all. These warders had to repeat the name Har Dayal several times to fix it in their mind. This further agitated Savarkar. That Indians should have no

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26 A widow burned on her husband's funeral pyre; also a lady who immolated herself to escape dishonor.

clue about those who, at the risk of their lives, fought for the freedom of their country was tragic!

Even Murray kept on and on at him about Har Dayal. Each time Savarkar retorted boldly, "He is my intimate friend."

"Oh, Savarkar," taunted Barrie, "he has implicated himself in the Hardinge bomb incident and is accused of murder."

"Maybe," replied Savarkar hotly, "but that does not lower him in the least in my esteem. Our friendship remains true."

Savarkar, having completely lost his cool by now, was simply unable to maintain his usual humorous and polite mask. Everyone worried that the authorities would consider his rash answers seditious.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu agitatedly, "please, *please* calm down. These people are just looking for an opportunity to get you. Don't hand them the excuse on a platter."

"Keshu, Lala Har Dayal is my dear friend. I will not disown him. I will not be such a coward. If I have to suffer punishment for it, so be it!"

Fortunately, within two days Savarkar learned that Lala Har Dayal was released on bail and had managed to escape to Switzerland, possibly with the connivance of the U.S. government. He recovered his equanimity and was equal to the task of dealing with Barrie and his cruel taunts.

"Savarkar, your friend was tried and sentenced," teased Barrie. "Any day a Chalan will bring him to Port Blair."

"Be sure to put him in the cell next to mine. We have a lot to catch up on!" Savarkar replied sweetly.

Barrie nodded his head seriously, but the others started laughing; he realized they were on to him. His lies were not going to fool anyone anymore!

Many Europeans visiting the islands came to the Cellular Jail particularly to see Savarkar—as if it were a museum and he an exhibit in it . . . ! Barrie loved basking in the reflected glory of Savarkar's eminence. He made a great show before granting them permission to see Savarkar. They had to dole out dollops of butter and make many applications. Sometimes, under the

guise of great secrecy, he condescended to give them only a glimpse of Savarkar; other times he allowed them to meet him, but rarely, unless they were VIPs, could the visitors participate in any conversation.

One day he brought a small group to Savarkar's workshop. Savarkar's cooperation was essential. "Mr. Savarkar, I do so like to talk with an educated man like you," he said admiringly, a conciliatory smile pasted on his face. He was not above dishing out the butter himself . . . ! "I heard you wrote a book on the Indian mutiny of 1857?"

Savarkar smiled a little, not unwilling to be distracted from the monotonous work.

"Were you not disgusted with those Monsters of Depravity, Nanasaheb and Tatya Tope?" Barrie continued. "What horrors have they not committed? My father told me that Nanasaheb personally tortured a group of British women in Lucknow."

"Was your father an eyewitness, then?" queried Savarkar tartly.

"No, but a colonel who was in Lucknow at the time witnessed it all and told my father."

"Then this colonel has told an outright lie! At the time of that incident Nanasaheb was in Cawnpore."

"Oh well, there are a thousand other incidents also." Barrie was not willing to back off before the visitors.

"But," put in Savarkar, "they could very well be rumors, just like this one."

Intrigued, one of the visitors intervened. "Mr. Savarkar, wasn't Nanasaheb responsible for the burning alive of several British women in Cawnpore? You must recoil from him in contempt for *that*, surely! Nanasaheb—and Tatya Tope too—must have been very selfish men, indeed!"

A visitor with permission to speak . . . ! Must be a VIP!

"Sir, if I defend the history of my country as I want to, Mr. Barrie very likely will punish me. You, however, are free to criticize it. It is a very unequal situation."

Barrie at once rushed into speech: "Mr. Savarkar, I am here as a friend, right now, not your jailer. Please, feel free to speak your mind."

The visitors must be VVIPs, indeed . . . !

"In that case, I surely will. That *anyone* should distort the history of my country and misrepresent her heroes is intolerable to me!" said Savarkar passionately. "To remain silent would be a sin. The commission appointed by the British government itself has completely exonerated Nanasaheb of this charge . . . ! Those baseless and exaggerated statements were the creation of some wicked soldiers in the British camp. As for your accusation of selfishness, was Victor Emmanuel selfish because he wanted to be King of Italy? Is it not true that George Washington desired to be the first President of America and Garibaldi wished to be a hero of Italy? They all fought for the independence of their country! *They* are not considered selfish; why label the Indian heroes so?"

But the visitor was not done. "Do you mean that there was no slaughter of the British women at Cawnpore?"

"No, that deplorable fact is certainly true. But what led to that incident? By the testimony of the survivors and other independent sources, we know that the women were, at first, treated as prisoners of war. Then the British army came marching into Cawnpore and burnt several villages around it to ashes. The women of the rebelling soldiers *died* in those fires. When they found out that their women prisoners had sent secret notes to the very army that had committed the horror, all hell broke loose. Nanasaheb's soldiers—acting without his knowledge or consent—killed the women. In this incident both parties are equally guilty of atrocities. Yet statues of the generals of the British army have been erected. Neill[27] even writes in his

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27 Brigadier-General James George Smith Neill (26 May 1810-25 September 1857). He was ruthless in quelling the sepoys and civilians in the Indian War of Independence. Among other things, he lined up the rebelling sepoys and shot them one by one; he also made civilian prisoners lick blood of the walls and commit other humiliating acts before hanging them or blowing

diary: 'It was my duty to follow this policy of cruelty for the good of my country.' Can we not say the same for the Indian mutineers? Glorify one, then you have to glorify the other too. Condemn one, then condemn them both."

The visitor considered this for a bit. "I grant you there is truth in what you say, but what is the moral we can derive for today?"

"That," said Savarkar promptly, "is none of my concern. I spoke here *only* as a matter of historical discussion. You *cannot*—seriously—expect me to hold forth on the present situation with you!" Savarkar was done with the conversation.

Barrie realized that and took leave. "We have spoken enough for today. You are in good health, I hope, Mr. Savarkar?" he enquired solicitously as he ushered the visitors out. Just as if it was not he who was making them all wretched here . . . !

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The authorities were very partial when it came to holidays. A Muslim was free to spend that day in idleness or chitchat. The Hindu convicts, on the other hand, got very few holidays, and when they got one, they were made by their warders to choose between work and solitary confinement. Such a glaring discrepancy had to be fixed. Savarkar was not one to take *any* injustice lying down. On June 8, he induced all the Hindu convicts to go on strike and joined the strike himself. Murray hotfooted it to the jail. When the matter was disclosed to him, he realized there was a real injustice here.

"I shall grant the Hindus their right, but I want no more of the strikes, Savarkar!" he warned. "This time they go free of punishment; next time I will not hesitate to punish!"

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them off by cannons. He died in action and received many accolades from the British. The rank and precedence of the wife of a K.C.B (Knight Commander) was given to his widow, and memorials have been erected in Lucknow and at Ayr, Scotland, to honor him. An island of the Andaman was also named after him.

Savarkar, satisfied to have gotten his way and righted a wrong, acceded readily.

The Muslim warders from Punjab, the Pathans, and the Moplahs saw it as their sacred religious duty to increase the number of Muslims in jail. They wielded their power, used bribery, and threatened hard labor to convert the Hindu to Islam. The Hindu convicts made it easy for them too. How ready they were to ostracize their "soiled" brethren!

How to prevent this forced conversion was the dilemma facing Savarkar. *One step at a time,* he told himself.

A young Brahmin boy was being threatened with kolu work by Mirza if he did not convert. The boy, though a dissolute criminal of the first order, was a proud Hindu. He sent word to Savarkar for help. Immediate action was called for. Savarkar approached Barrie. Barrie was not willing to hear a word against his henchman. Luckily it was petition day. Savarkar approached Murray. But Murray was primed by Barrie.

"Savarkar, what does it matter if such an evil person is Hindu or Muslim?" Murray asked impatiently.

"Sir, whether he is evil or not is not the issue here. I am trying to prevent his conversion."

"How can you prevent a man from choosing to change his religion?"

"I have no objection to conversion by choice, but force is unacceptable." Savarkar persisted, as the issue was close to his heart. "Every person has the right to keep his religion."

"Well, Savarkar, catch them in the act and I will take action."

This enraged the Muslim warders. That anyone should complain about their divine right to convert *kafirs* . . . ! Preposterous! They at once started a campaign of tutoring the boy that he was embracing Islam by choice. The very next day he was brought to block 7 at mealtime and made to sit in the Muslim line. He was even given a Muslim name. The warders called out to Savarkar with abusive names and other insults. There was not much Savarkar could do right then except lump

it. He kept a sharp lookout, however, and the very next morning he saw a Muslim warder give the boy succa. At once Savarkar called Bajira to his aid and made a big fuss. The tobacco was found. Mirza Khan came on the scene and took the matter to Barrie. And there it rested.

When Savarkar made enquiries, Barrie told him rudely, "You are a nobody here, Savarkar! If you interfere in matters that do not concern you, you will be punished."

Two days later, Murray was in the jail. Savarkar called out, "A petition, please!"

"Savarkar, this is not the day for petitions, and you are not even speaking for yourself." Murray made as if to move on.

"Sir!" Savarkar cracked out. "When you receive complaints about political prisoners from warders, you entertain them on any day and even hand out punishment. I *will* make my petition today. You may do as you like with it. I consider it—the bribing of a young boy to convert him from his faith—a matter of extreme gravity!"

These hot words stopped Murray in his tracks. He was forced to listen to Savarkar's petition. Then he called Mirza for verification.

"Sarkar," lied Mirza, "it was badababu himself who gave the boy succa to implicate the warder and make trouble."

Not for a second did Murray believe this! The boy was questioned; he told the truth and was saved. Mirza was sternly rebuked.

Thanks to Savarkar's persistence, forcible conversions were soon strictly forbidden. The Muslim warders were simply *furious* at this turn of events. Savarkar was a great nuisance and a threat to the set pattern of their life. They wished for his death.

Soon after, Keshu came across a Moplah warder and a Hindu convict—the worst of his kind, a total degenerate, in fact—engrossed in a whispered conversation in Malayalam. This was the language spoken in Pongur in the Malabar region; Keshu knew it well. But it was a well-kept secret, not being in

keeping with his new identity. From the scraps that fell on his ears, he learned that the Hindu convict was going to give a bowl of poisoned food to Savarkar! Shocked, Keshu stopped and turned toward them. Immediately the two dispersed. Keshu went to Babarao with the news. Babarao gave firm instructions to Savarkar not to eat or drink anything but the common food. They were all alert, awaiting developments.

Sure enough, the very next day the man crept past Keshu's cell toward Savarkar's. Keshu started making a racket, shouting and banging his cell door. Scared, the convict quickly tossed the bowl, a makeshift coconut shell, into Savarkar's cell and took off for safety. Savarkar poured the poisoned food in his piss-pot and threw the bowl in the yard at the back. With the Muslim warders all in cahoots it was going to be difficult to prove, and least said soonest mended, he figured. It was his general policy not to carry tales of personal harassment to the authorities. All his petitions and complaints were for the bigger cause.

Murray grilled Keshu for the commotion he had created. Wild, unsupported accusations did not go down well with him. Keshu was punished with three days of standing handcuffs.

He fumed in his cell. Fear for Savarkar's safety had gripped him. He was convinced that Mirza was at the bottom of it all. The very day he was free, Mirza came before him to gloat. In the blink of an eye, Keshu launched himself on Mirza and knocked him to the ground. He had him face down pinned with a knee on his back and hands twisted behind. Keshu said, very viciously, "You coward! Touch a hair on Tatyarao's head and I'll break your neck!"

Everyone looked on, open-mouthed. Keshu had even surprised himself. Mirza was a bully who preyed on the weak; with Keshu's show of strength he started whining and pleading.

"Babu, I would never do such a thing. It was not me. No, never!"

"Well, it is you I will get, nevertheless"—Keshu twisted his arms some more—"so make sure it doesn't happen again."

"Yes, babu! Very good, babu," said Mirza obsequiously, and Keshu let him go.

No one called Barrie; the curtain was dropped on the incident.

Later, Savarkar told him, "What a firebrand you are, Keshu. That was quite a risk you took!"

"Tatyarao, I cannot bear the thought of anyone daring to take your life. Over my dead body!" avowed Keshu.

Seeing Keshu's face—so full of purpose and resolution—and clenched fists, Savarkar had to smile. "Looks like I have a bodyguard, then!"

* * *

International events were marching on. World War I was declared on August 4, 1914. Even the Andaman Islands were not untouched by it. This was the golden opportunity for which Savarkar had worked so furiously when in England. His society, the Abhinav Bharat, had developed contacts with agitators and patriots from Germany, France, Ireland, Egypt and Turkey. After his arrest, his Marseilles escape and the many international issues that it raised had kept India in the forefront of the news. Germany was quick to realize that India would be a handy weapon to have in her dealings with Britain. German officials had made overtures to the revolutionaries, and some of them had settled there, whereas others had settled in the U.S. and formed the Ghadar Party. An efficient secret communication system was set up, through convicts coming and going from the Andaman, to communicate with Savarkar.

There was now a great upheaval on the island. Officers were scurrying around. The military was called upon to protect the shore day and night. More troops were called in from Calcutta. An arsenal and ammunition depot was set up right next to the prison. Trenches were dug around the wall, and soldiers were posted there to guard the prison. The officers tried to keep the reason for all this furious activity quiet, but the news leaked out

anyway: the German cruiser *Emdem* was plying the ocean near the Andaman Islands. The rumor spread like wildfire that it was there to free the political prisoners. Savarkar, with his secret communication, knew this for a fact. His society had contacted Kaiser Wilhelm II and arranged for the *Emdem* to bombard the island and release him. That was the Indian revolutionary and German dream. The British officers in the Andaman, however, stood like a rock in their path. Though grossly outnumbered, they did not succumb to panic. Living up to the traditions of a great empire, they were ready to defend it. The sheer tenacity of their nature, their determination to succeed, and their utter commitment to discipline with no thought to the odds—these British traits carried them through. Their women backed them up courageously. And so a handful of British officers not only kept danger at bay, but also saw to it that the daily profit-making routine of the jail went on as usual. Like clockwork.

The *Emdem* looted the British ships bringing money and goods to the islands. The shortage was felt keenly, but life continued all the same. Savarkar prepared all the political prisoners for the possibility of escape. These days their mood swung between wild hope and utter despair.

The convicts now had to work even harder, upon threat of thrashing, to produce several pounds more of oakum. Large quantities were required to make tarpaulin, which was used in defensive positions. Savarkar was appointed a supervisor. The carrot of becoming a warder was dangled before his eyes, as long as he squeezed the extra work out of the prisoners. By now, every convict knew Savarkar sided with justice—*always*.

"Badebabu," they complained, "we are bound to give our normal two pounds and will even give a little more. But why should we be forced to pick this huge quantity of oakum for the war? It is not India's war that we must kill ourselves for it."

Savarkar was in complete agreement.

No one would dare to thrash anyone under his charge. Every convict knew that! So they did not come up with the expected amount. Barrie was very angry, especially since Mirza told him

Savarkar was spreading sedition. Immediately Savarkar was stripped of his responsibility and sent to work in his cell in solitary confinement.

The authorities also came up with a scheme to supplement the British coffers. All prisoners were required to contribute monetarily from their meager allowance toward the war. The blood and sweat of the prisoners running the profit-making factories of the Andaman were not enough, apparently. The authorities wanted their pound of flesh too .·.·. !

Even so, the war brought on a queer elation in the minds of the convicts. Germany was their savior! Visions of a free life floated before their eyes. They constantly told each other, "Work, work, it is only for a few days more. Soon we shall go home."

The warders, too, forbore from harassing the convicts. Hindus and Muslims, both came to Savarkar to avidly hear the latest news of the war. Savarkar used this enthusiasm to teach them world geography. Many of them had heard of no country beyond India, Turkey, and Britain. He drew maps on the ground to explain their locations and also slipped in lectures on the geography of India. To the more literate he also gave facts and figures, and what information he had on the warships and submarines. But to everyone he cautioned that it was a mistake to think Germany would be any kinder to India. She would harass and persecute India just as much, if not more, than Britain.

"See here," said Savarkar, "there was a donkey that was made to work very hard by the potter, his master. He dreamed of freedom. At last the potter died. But what happened? He was sold to another potter who worked him just as much. New master or old, the donkey remained a donkey. We have to be free, without any masters at all, or we shall remain a donkey too."

The Muslims would say at once, "Oh, we shall be no donkeys, for the Sultan of Turkey will rule India, and the Muslims will be very powerful. All the best jobs and high positions will be ours. Non-Muslims will be severely punished!"

Turkey had allied itself with Germany in the war. The Muslims, especially of the Malabar region, had this agreeable dream of the Sultan of Turkey becoming the ruler of all. He was godlike to them. From their cradle they were taught to revere and worship his name. Since 1857 there was an aggressive propaganda in India to promote the Turkish Sultan as the Universal Caliph, God's shadow on Earth, the religious head of all Muslims and their protector. The half-educated and ill-informed among the Indian Muslims were captivated by the rhetoric speeches, books, articles, and texts making extravagant claims. They looked forward with eagerness to the day when the Caliph, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, would take India into his fold. When Savarkar tried to explain that the invasion of the Sultan would be nothing but disaster for India, they could not believe it. Their fanaticism prevented them from thinking nationally.

Savarkar thought long and hard. Germany, with Turkey to back her, was stretching her long arm to India. That was to the advantage of India. Britain could give India her rights in exchange for help in the war. Or India could wrest her freedom forcibly as both Britain and Germany lay war-torn and battered. But this might also create the devil's own opportunity for the Muslims in India to reach out to the Muslim hordes from the north, especially Afghanistan. Very possibly, perhaps aided and abetted by Russia, they would as in the past ravage and conquer India.

With his acumen and shrewd grasp on international politics, Savarkar settled his line of action: Let Britain give to India the self-government they wanted; what need for a revolution, then? In the struggle for freedom there should be consistency with the aim; there need not be consistency with strategy.

As the leader of the revolutionary movement it was essential that he put in words his stance on the war. He wrote to the Government of India: "It is our ideal to win independence, but we are not sworn to violent means alone. We have for our ultimate

goal the creation of a federation of nations with equal rights for all. We want this federation to be the guardian of freedom, peace, and justice the world over. All distinctions of race and language, creed and color, of territories and boundaries, ought to be submerged in this Parliament, for the unification of man and promotion of peace. These being our principle, we are willing to be friends with the British Empire if it equips India with a form of government vital for her freedom and progress. The revolutionaries of the past would then stop all violence and wholeheartedly help Britain in her present war."

Release us, that we may convince the people of this truth. We pledge our word of honor that we will bring recruits to the Indian army in large numbers to stave off the invasion of India from the joined forces of Afghanistan and Turkey. Do not think that I ask this to attain my own freedom by making false promises. Hold me back but set the others free."

To this point of view he persuaded his colleagues in prison too. The safety of India from new marauders and the gaining of concessions from the British were paramount.

Sunday, November 8: Savarkar and Keshu sat in the yard. Gripped by a sudden longing, Keshu said, "Tatyarao, will you please recite your *Ode to the Ocean*?"

"Certainly, Keshu. I warn you, though—I will be very emotional." He took a deep breath and recited:

Take me, O Ocean! Take me to my Motherland!
My soul is in torment away from her,
So much torment, O Ocean!
O abounding with stars is the heaven above,
But love only do I
The bright star of my Motherland!
O abounding with magnificent palaces these lands are,
But love only do I
Ever the humble hut in my Motherland!
O Pitiless One, how you mock me with your foaming surf!
Think you my Mother is helpless—that you dare deceive her so!
That you dare condemn me to this longing so!

More deception is futile now, O Lord of the Rivers,
Let you not be spared, vow I
Suffer the same pangs, say I
Of separation from the most beloved of your rivers!
My soul is in torment away from her,
So much torment, O Ocean!

The poignant words transported Savarkar to the day in Brighton when he had composed this poem. Those were difficult days: the police hounding him; no one willing to give him shelter, dangerous revolutionary that he was; no home, no money, far away in an alien land, still working for the salvation of his country. How difficult had been the life of his young wife, Yamuna—alone at home, grieving over the death of their four-year-old son, Prabhakar . . . . He had never been able to be any kind of husband to her. Even now she was living on the bounty of others . . .

"Tatyarao"—Savarkar jerked out of his reverie—"can it really be true that Mohandas Gandhi has offered *unconditional* support to the British in their war?"

"Keshu, what brings Gandhi to mind at such a moment?"

"Oh, Tatyarao, I am *so* aggravated by his oft-declared faithful allegiance to the British!"

"I see you have been scrounging for news of him in the newspapers."

"Yes, Tatyarao! And in Poona, too, I was shocked with what I learned about him from Damu. Damu's friend in South Africa had sent him many cuttings from Gandhi's paper, *Indian Opinion.* He even had a copy of his *Hind Swaraj*. Since then, I don't trust Gandhi."

"How very interesting, Keshu."

"Oh, Tatyarao," cried Keshu, "he says India can have her freedom, but it is not necessary to expel the British! That they—the ones who have raped our motherland—are imperialists working for the good of mankind! He can be no patriot of India!"

"So far he has not involved himself directly in the politics of India, Keshu. He was stationed in South Africa for the last so many years, too, though he does appear to be a protégé of Gokhale."

"But his doings in South Africa got so much publicity; so many are impressed with him. Indians won't accept his ideas, will they, Tatyarao? I couldn't bear it. They are so nonsensical! He says India will prosper only after inviting utmost suffering upon herself! In his *Hind Swaraj* he declares that hospitals are institutions for propagating sins. He frowns upon modern medicine, modern education, and modern technology. Machinery represents sin, he says . . . ! He advocates a life of celibacy and poverty too."

"Keshu, Keshu, you have let this man become a bogey in your mind."

"Oh, Tatyarao, I *am* sorry, to bring this up—but . . . but . . . we are ready to die for our motherland and he . . ."

Savarkar gripped his hand. "I understand, Keshu . . . I *do*. It is very hard to be helpless here, when we should be out there saving our Mother." His voice rose passionately. "Our motherland *must* be freed, Keshu; she *must* have freedom . . . ." Spontaneously he recited:

O Goddess of Freedom,
Life is to die for you,
Death is to live without you!
Here is the Bounteous One, our very own Motherland,
Why, oh why, did you push her away?
Oh, why did your motherly love of old wither away?
Oh, so anguished is my soul!
For she is now but a slave to others,
Why, oh why, did you abandon her so?
Answer me, I pray!

Tears rolled down their cheeks with every word he uttered; the wild hope that the *Emdem* would be successful in its

mission fluttered in their breast. Their beloved Hindustan, their Mother India, was so near—yet so far.

Three days later they received news that on November 10 the *Emdem* had sunk off the coast of the Coco Islands, which practically kissed the shores of the Andaman. Oh God! How *close* had been their escape! All hope of rescue had now sunk with the *Emdem*—back it was to unrelieved desolation and wretchedness.

1915

It was Barrie's nature to spring bad news upon Savarkar with gusto. "Savarkar, I have news for you. Gokhale is dead."

The news caught Savarkar unawares. He was overcome with sorrow.

Barrie was surprised. "But what is this? Was he not against you?"

Savarkar, with effort, pulled himself together. "I have great respect for him, Barrie. He was sincerely devoted to the cause of India. Our ideologies were different, but that does not make us enemies."

"Surely he publicly declared that there would be no peace in India unless you were caught and punished? And what of the conspiracy to kill him that was exposed in your trial?"

"You cannot believe everything you hear. So he criticized our way of doing things; that does not detract from his patriotism. A few of the revolutionaries were upset and talked of killing him. At no time can I condone such an act. To attack *anyone,* never mind a patriot of your own country, for an honest difference of opinion is a very reprehensible act, an unpardonable sin. I reprimanded them severely." Savarkar turned away. He wanted to grieve in solitude.

Now Babarao, Wamanrao, and Keshu were allowed to prepare their own food. Cooked rice and bread were provided by the common kitchen, but they could make curries, savories, and condiments. Garlic and spices were readily available. Babarao

was a master chef. They enjoyed the culinary delights he served. Keshu tended a vegetable patch to widen their choice of food. But hard labor and jail food was still Savarkar's lot. Babarao and Keshu managed to smuggle food to him sometimes. When he had first arrived here, he was in top form because of the rigorous fitness and exercise program he had followed. Now at age thirty-two, Savarkar's health was showing signs of breaking down.

One Sunday, Keshu came up to Savarkar. "Tatyarao, I have some food for you, cooked by my inexperienced hands."

"Thank you, Keshu. I hope I can keep it down. Sometimes my digestion is shot to pieces."

These small changes in the diet and routine were the highlights of this jail life. They both sat on the ground, leaning back against the workshop wall.

"Are you not having any, Keshu?"

"I am full, Tatyarao. I have something particular to talk to you about—just as soon as you are done eating."

"Let me make a guess. You are worked up over Gandhi again!"

"Do you ever get anything wrong, Tatyarao? Of course, it is about him! Look what I read in the newspaper: Gandhi was awarded the Kaiser-e-Hind medal for his loyal service to the British Empire . . . ! Do you know"—Keshu gritted his teeth—"for seven months he had written letter after letter to the government asking for the privilege—*privilege*, his word, mind you—to carry arms to fight against the Zulus, in their rebellion! *Tcha!* Did he forget his principle of nonviolence? But the government only allowed the Indians to be in the ambulance corps. And now *Sergeant* Gandhi has a medal to show for it! *This*, at a time when patriots are rousing themselves and suffering agonies to free Hindustan! I think Gandhi should have refused it, Tatyarao!"

"Is that likely, Keshu?" said Savarkar, ironically. "Anyway, the British welcome Gandhi, who is bolstering their empire with his constant tirade against the revolutionaries, and promotion of his concept of nonviolence."

"Well, the medal certainly shows their appreciation for it! Thank God, at least the Indian leaders are opposing his view of nonviolence! See this article that Lala Lajpat Rai has written in the *Modern Review*: 'There is no religion higher than truth, or a course of conduct nobler than the dharma of nonviolence. Rightly understood and rightly applied it makes a man a saint and a hero. Misunderstood and wrongly applied it makes man cowardly, craven, base, and stupid. When well-intentioned saintly people made a fad of it and made it the sole test of good life—honor and self-respect were thrown into the shade. This perverted use of it, at the cost of everything else, has brought about the social, political, and moral downfall of the Hindus. It is like gangrene. It converts men into monomaniacs and cowards and leads to a life of hypocrisy, unmanliness, and cruelty.' There it is, Tatyarao, in the words of a great leader like Lalaji!"

"India still has stalwarts as her leaders. Besides, Tilak is more than capable of handling Gandhi. *But*"—Savarkar sat up straighter—"absolute nonviolence is absolutely sinful! There is no virtue in suffering in silence, cowering nonviolently, while the aggressor crushes you under his feet. It is the very negation of the Bhagavad Gita![28] Hindustan cannot be allowed to become a victim of Gandhi's woolly-headed ideas!" Savarkar got up and started pacing restlessly. "Keshu, so much needs to be done. *And* we have to wash the Hindu society of its social evils too!"

"Tatyarao, Gandhi is strenuously *against* getting rid of the birth-based caste system, though he does support removal of untouchability.[29] He says it is a sin for people of different castes to eat together, and that to intermarry is promiscuous! He believes in the superiority of the Aryan race—that was obvious in his writings of the Indian Opinion. In South Africa, he fought with the Government to have a separate entrance to

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28 The Bhagavad Gita was expounded by Shri Krishna, a Hindu God, to the warrior Arjuna on the battlefield during the Mahabharata war to convince him to fight the righteous war against his cousins.

29 The quality or condition of being an "untouchable"—the lowest stratum in the birth-based caste system in Hindu society.

the post office for the Indians. He didn't want to share one with the natives! *Tcha!*"

"If ever our motherland falls into the hands of Gandhi, Keshu, I will have to fight tooth and nail to educate our people. I shall willingly sacrifice popularity for the human cause and my principles. Untouchability has to go! Birth-based caste system has to be destroyed! Only then can our society live in peace and prosperity and work toward universal welfare." He sank back on the ground next to Keshu. "*All* subject nations, Keshu, not just India, have to be liberated. Love, equality, and peace *must* be established on Earth. Our ultimate political goal is a World Commonwealth of Nations, with equal rights for all. I have a deep belief in Saint Tukaram's words: 'My country! Oh, Brothers, the limits of the Universe—there the frontiers of my country lie!'"

Savarkar, though a staunch Hindu, had deep respect for all religions. Being a voracious reader with an insatiable curiosity, he had read the Bible since childhood and was particularly attracted to the life of Jesus. He had even composed a poem in his honor. One of his favorite books was Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*.

Savarkar constantly butted heads with the Muslim warders, not because they were Muslims, but because they were fanatics who encroached upon the rights of others. He had Muslim members in his Abhinav Bharat and had a warm relationship with many Muslims here. He read the Koran in the original with them, with utmost devotion.

The British officers occasionally asked him to entertain them with his compositions. He sometimes wrote little poems in English for them. He did not hate the British; it was the British rule in India that he abhorred!

Expecting to meet a wild, raving man, foaming at the mouth, rabid in his hatred of the British, many a British man was surprised to meet the real Savarkar—polite, respectful, soft-spoken, and of razor-sharp intellect.

Chapter Six

1918-Early 1919

Keshu lay on his bunk, very restless at heart. For the last six months he was moved to the outside barracks to work in the gardens in Navy Bay. The work had a lot of fringe benefits—gifts and tips from the British ladies visiting the gardens, and fruits and vegetables given by the gardener, Dhondupant. He had not seen Savarkar all these months. He was very, *very* worried about him. Savarkar's health had failed rapidly. He had been in the hospital for almost a year—unable to keep any food down; his head hurting terribly; with reading and composing poems being impossible! To avoid temptation, he kept no books by his side. *Tatyarao without books—it was impossible to imagine!* Keshu stirred agitatedly, his chest raw with pain fearing for his guru's life.

"Hey you!" called an aggrieved voice. "Settle down, bastard!"

Sleep was a precious commodity, and no convict liked to lose any. Keshu forced himself to settle, but he could not sleep. He thought about the life here now. There was a *big* change. The Cellular Jail was flooded with political prisoners! The revolutionaries had managed to create a great agitation in India. The Ghadar Party had gathered patriots, mostly Sikhs, from all over the world; they had come in droves to save their country. The British government was not caught napping! They unleashed their typical modus operandi—tightened security, infiltration of the groups, scotching of plans, and meting out

severe punishment. The Defense of India Regulations Act was passed, and hordes of Indians, some even innocent of the charge, were tried and sentenced to the gallows, transportation, or imprisonment.

The first batch of ninety-six prisoners, a volatile, raging mass of humanity, arrived here in early 1917. They were not willing to put up with anything—not hard labor, not insults, nor the senseless rules—and were ever ready to hit out with fists and words. Parmanand of Jhansi had even slapped Barrie's face! Retribution was swift and brutal. His body was bloodied by twenty whiplashes. Caning and whipping were now the order of the day. The authorities crossed all limits to control this molten, bubbling volcano.

Two particular incidents led to a massive strike. Chatar Singh had attempted to stab Murray. Not even a hair of his was harmed, but Chatar was doled out an inhuman punishment. He was put in a cage—a *cage*!—three feet high and hardly long enough to stretch his legs. This was his home to eat, sleep, work, and answer nature's call. It was *barbaric* . . . ! He was still rotting there, a living testimony to the horrendous heights the British were ready to scale.

It did not stop the others.

The next victim was Bhan Singh. He was beaten one evening until he vomited blood. His cries for help still reverberate in the jail.

An immediate strike was called out. Keshu's mind shuddered from bringing up the memories of the punishments inflicted on these patriots. The authorities lay exposed—stripped of *every* vestige of civilized behavior. Humanity, never a concept familiar here, was now buried deep, very deep. Many of the patriots died, but still the strike was not called off. Finally, they too were given their concessions.

It was *heartbreaking* . . . ! Need every new batch that came here be dragged through hell before concessions could be given? Why did the British need to inflict inhuman torture upon the prisoners—to bolster their pride? To enhance the prestige of

their empire? To maintain the fiction of their superiority? Were Indians *not* worthy of being treated like human beings? Oh, Mother, how can you be saved from these monstrous hands?

Tatyarao . . . he *had* to meet Tatyarao . . . had to see how he was faring—*how* to do it?

There was only one way into the Cellular Jail for him—through the sick bay. Unfortunately, his health was quite robust. He had maintained his exercise routine. The quality of food had improved over the years—Babarao's cuisine had been lip-smackingly good! No one had dared to take his share of yogurt. Here he supplemented his diet by fruits and vegetables from the garden. He would have to induce a sickness. The enterprising Raghu would have to procure powdered jamalgota for him.

The next morning, Raghu promised to deliver the goods by the end of the day. Keshu could hardly keep his mind on his work all day. Dhondupant was concerned. He loved this bright young man.

"*Bala,*[30] what ails you today? I have never seen you so much on edge."

"It is nothing, Dhondupant."

"Well, well, look who is here! Maybe she can put you in a good mood," he said slyly.

Keshu turned to see. It was young Mrs. Mary Scott, an officer's wife. She made every excuse to come to this garden and spend some time talking to him. She was a cute little thing with a heart-shaped face and big green eyes. But . . . she wasn't like the others; they just talked a little, sometimes gave little gifts—nothing out of the ordinary. This one . . . ! Always so eager . . . so . . . so . . .

Nothing but complications could arise from it . . . !

"Hello, Mr. Soman!" she was trilling. "Look, I have brought you a packet."

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30 Bala, bal: little one.

"You shouldn't have, ma'am"—he clapped a mental hand to his forehead—"we can both get into trouble."

She pouted a little, looking stubborn. "You take gifts from the others, don't you?"

"Yes, I do—but not from you. I do not want you to talk to me."

Keshu turned to go. She grabbed his arm. Instinctively he jerked his arm, but she clung like a limpet. This lady would likely be the death of him—literally . . . ! He almost shoved her away and fled.

"I have a message for you from your hero."

Her voice floating behind him brought him to a halt. A message from Tatyarao! He turned and watched her with uncertain eyes.

"See, I have something you want, after all! I visited the jail yesterday." She pranced closer, her curls bouncing in the breeze. "Come with me and I will tell you about it."

Keshu's heart was crying for any news of Savarkar. He was *so* tempted. But would Savarkar send a message through a British officer's wife? *Ridiculous!*

"I am sorry, but I really mean what I say. I will not meet you. At all!" he cried and took to his heels.

Dhondupant had been watching the little scenario with glee. "The little madam too hot for you to handle, bala?" he chuckled.

Keshu, red in face, pulled at his ear lobes penitently. "*Ram, Ram, Ram,*[31] Dhondupant! That one's nothing but trouble! Isn't her husband enough to keep her happy? I am done with these British ladies, for sure!"

"I should have your troubles, bala! Alas! They do not give me a look." He was grinning all over his wrinkled face. He was sixty if he was a day! "Only you, Keshubal, could come to this hellish spot as a convict and have woman trouble!"

That evening Keshu took the powder with his water. All night he was in agonizing pain. In the morning, he passed blood

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31 Shri Ram is a deity. His name is chanted to cleanse one of sin.

in his stools. Happily, though in great physical discomfort, he trudged to the Cellular Jail. Mission accomplished! All day Keshu could only think of meeting Savarkar. In the afternoon, he managed to make it to his bedside—and stared in shock! Surely this shrunken heap of skin and bones, with the bald pate—*bald!*—was not his Tatyarao!

"Tatyarao! Tatyarao!" he whispered, tears rolling down his cheeks.

Savarkar opened his eyes, slowly. Keshu handed him his glasses. A ghost of a smile passed over the well-loved face.

"Keshu . . . ! I thought you were working outside."

"I was. I am"—his eyes avoided Savarkar's—"I fell sick, so here I am."

"The truth, Keshu—please!"

Keshu caught his hand and held it to his chest. "I *had* to see you, Tatyarao. You know I will do anything for you, anything!"

There was a gleam of moisture in Savarkar's eyes. He tried to be detached. Where was the room for human relationships in his life? Look what he had brought upon his own family! But this boy . . . how had he slipped past his defenses?

"And what have you done, Keshu?" he asked, trying to infuse some sternness in his tones.

Keshu looked at Savarkar a little defiantly, dropping his hand. "I just swallowed some powdered jamalgota," he said all in a rush.

There was a shocked silence in the room. Savarkar struggled to get up. "Keshu, Keshu! You must not do such a thing ever again. Fortune has given you good health; you must not abuse your body!"

"What choice did I have?" cried Keshu. "How else could I see you?"

Savarkar fell back on the bed with a sigh. "I am as good as this body of mine. I lie here unable to do anything. Even thinking is bringing on a severe migraine!" There was a long pause. "Keshu, I am glad you came, for I want to say good-bye."

"Good-bye!" exclaimed Keshu. "Have they released you?"

"No, Keshu, but it is time for me to leave this body. This garment of flesh is so tattered and torn that my soul can no longer wear it."

For a minute, Keshu could hardly believe his ears. Then he jumped up. "Tatyarao, are you talking of suicide? *Suicide . . . !* How many times have you brought our thoughts back from death? Held our pieces together? And now you . . . ! I *knew* I needed to be here." Keshu agitatedly paced the length of the bed.

"Keshu, settle down. You are making me dizzy."

Keshu immediately sat down next to him. "Tatyarao, your work is not done. What about your oath? Is Mother India free? You cannot leave us. It is your strength that is keeping our spirits up. You *cannot* leave us!"

"Keshu, I am so feeble. I cannot eat, think, read . . . . I am no better than a vegetable. What use is this life?"

Oh God! How apathetic Tatyarao sounded, so, so unlike himself! I must rouse him from this, I must! thought Keshu determinedly.

"Maybe I am being very selfish, Tatyarao"—Keshu clutched Savarkar's hand again—"but we *need* you. If *you* can give up, there is no hope for the rest of us. You have achieved so much here! We have now established an education fund; the libraries and the literacy programs are flourishing. Murray is very proud of them too! Traders and professionals who visit the islands have joined our group and are spreading patriotism on the mainland. Best of all, now that so many clerks are Hindu, the jail correspondence is in Hindi! Urdu[32] has been left behind"—a look of great satisfaction settled on Savarkar's face—"I know for certain one more job for you to do."

Savarkar was intrigued. "Yes, Keshu?"

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32 Hindi, indigenous to India, is written in Devnagari script and is Sanskrit based. Urdu, though similar to it in phonology and grammar, was developed in India over the years by the alien Islamic rulers and is written in the Nastaliq style of the Persian language, relying heavily on Persian and Arabic for vocabulary.

"Change the language of the schools to Hindi! Hindu children are being forced to learn in Urdu here. They are unable to read our literature. Surely we must change that?"

"Yes, Keshu, we must change that," said Savarkar resolutely.

Well Keshu knew that Savarkar was incapable of resting in peace when there was work to be done.

"Keshu, you are a conniving devil. I see what you are up to," said Savarkar, a touch mischievously. "Wait, I am going to give you some of your own. I hear you are becoming quite a ladies' man . . . ?"

Keshu blushed to the roots of his short-cropped hair. Even here in the hospital there was not much that Tatyarao missed!

"Er . . . I . . . that is . . ."

Savarkar laughed, clutching his head. It was worth any amount of embarrassment just to hear that sound again.

"Out with it, Keshu! What have you been doing?"

"Well, it is not I, Tatyarao, but these ladies. They have not much to occupy them here and . . ."

"You are playing with fire, you know."

"Tatyarao!" exclaimed Keshu, scandalized. "I have not touched one of them! Indeed, I have to confess, I have no idea what to do with a woman if I got one!"

Savarkar really had to laugh at that. "Oh my head, Keshu . . . !"—he rubbed his forehead—"I really shouldn't laugh! But hopefully, Keshu, the Government of India will grant amnesty, at least to you, in celebration of winning this war. Go home, find a nice young bride, and believe me, your instincts will take over."

"But . . . is it fair to marry when our life, our future, is so uncertain? Will we not just expose another family to tragedy, Tatyarao? Expose another girl to possible widowhood?"

"Keshu, when I was younger, we gave a lot of thought to this. Life is uncertain for everybody. Plague, sickness, accident—anything can kill a person. Does that mean people stay single out of that fear? No! Our Mother India needs staunch, patriotic, red-blooded sons—*our* sons! It is our duty

to marry and have children. Yes, our spouses may have to suffer and sacrifice a lot. But no sacrifice is too much for the honor of our Mother! As for widowhood, every man should encourage his wife to remarry in the possibility of his death. Why should widows suffer? Men remarry—why not women? They must have the same rights as men!"

"Oh, Tatyarao, I couldn't agree more with you! In fact, I am not going to marry a young girl, ever!" said Keshu vehemently.

"What do you mean, Keshu?"

"If I marry, it will be to a widow. Not a child-widow,[33] but one who has lived with her husband."

"Keshu! I am proud of you! It's such a profound idea. Our society is so riddled with damaging practices. There is so much work to be done, Keshu!"

Savarkar was lost in contemplation, but Keshu at once pounced upon his words.

"There, Tatyarao! You said it yourself. There is so much more work to be done. No more talk of suicide."

"Well," said Savarkar, considering Keshu's words, "how about I chart my health for two months and mark the days I feel good or bad. Then I can decide whether it is worth living."

Keshu pondered over this a bit. Already, he could see a spark of life on Savarkar's face. The deep depression was on the wane, hopefully.

"Will do, for now."

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33 It was the practice then to marry very young girls to adults, even old men. They didn't live together until the bride reached puberty. A girl widowed before that was called a child-widow. Widow remarriage was unacceptable in Hindu society then. *Only* the remarriage of child-widows was being strongly recommended by social reformers. But society still frowned upon it and harassed the woman. Remarriage of other widows was *unheard* of. Savarkar, from his earliest days (1900 and earlier), had *very* progressive ideas.

Savarkar faithfully followed the program of charting his health. Keshu equally faithfully kept an anxious eye on him. Most days were bad, but there was one here and there when Savarkar felt passably well. On those days, Keshu would generally inveigle some way to make it to his bed. Keshu had induced a few more attacks of bloody stools. Rather than bring him in over and over, the authorities transferred him to the Cellular Jail, which suited him admirably!

"Keshu, it is good to see you. Time hangs very heavily on one's hands when even thinking brings on a migraine. Was it wise, though, to give up your easy job for this hellhole?"

"What do I care for comfort, Tatyarao? I much, much prefer being here, looking out for you."

"Keshu, *Keshu* . . . ." Savarkar's eyes filled with tears.

Quickly, Keshu put in, "Don't worry, Tatyarao, it's only picking oakum. I am quite adept at it now"—*how should I distract him . . . ? Ah!*—"Tatyarao, Barrie seems to have thrown in the towel!"

"Oh yes, the loss of prestige, the grief we have caused here was too much for him. He is like a rock now, quite harmless unless one bangs one's head against it. The authorities, too, have bowed before our united front."

"Yes, but they have Chatar Singh still caged like an animal! How he wails sometimes . . ."

"Yes, that *is* monstrous! To *cage* him for almost two years . . . ! Freedom, Keshu, freedom . . . we *must* have it."

They lapsed into silence.

Keshu remembered something. "Er . . . Tatyarao—" he cleared his throat. "I hear a few rumbles and grumbles because we veterans did not take part in the last strike."

"Keshu, I *did* explain all to them." Savarkar raised his hands in a helpless gesture. "After years of struggling and much pain we had wrested some concessions, so *essential* for our propaganda, our literacy program, our communication with the outside world. Disaster to lose *that*! That would mean the death of the national movement! I will *never* advocate that."

"Those that complain don't see what was at stake—it would have axed your petition to Montague[34] too!" He shook his head sadly. "Some people are so short-sighted. *Tcha!*"

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By the end of two months, Savarkar's thoughts turned away from giving up his life. His health was improving slowly, but he was still weak. Reading was very arduous; far from composing poems—a breath of life to him—he was hard put to it to remember those he had composed so far.

He was moved to block 5 in a cell with an ocean view. For the *first* time in eight years he could see the outside world! He spent hours standing at the bars of his cell, his eyes feasting avidly upon the precious sight of the ocean and the island of Ross—the lush terraced greenery dotted with white-walled, red-roofed stately buildings. He could even watch the cows graze!

One rainy day he had a treat; a peacock unfurling his magnificent tail was doing a shimmering rain-dance at the very tip of the Ross Island. Even at this distance it was an unbelievable sight! A harbinger of hope, perhaps? So far, he had only heard its loud "me-e-o-ow" wail floating faintly across the water.

He watched the antics of the chickens in the doctor's yard beyond the wall: the way they jumped and cackled; fought over the corn; chased one another. He mastered the trilling of the bulbuls. He knew them in all their moods.

So time passed.

The Savarkar brothers had been entitled to a visit from their family for quite some time now. The Government shilly-shallied, always postponing the date. Finally, on May 30, 1919, Savarkar and Babarao were presented before their family—shackled hand and foot. Why the chains? Did the

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34 Edwin Montague, Secretary of State for India (1917-1922).

authorities expect them to make an impossible, miraculous escape? Or was it to heap more humiliation on them? The three brothers, Babarao, Tatyarao, and Narayanrao, fondly called Bal, were together for a brief hour, for the first time since 1906! Savarkar's wife, Yamuna, and Shanta, Narayanrao's wife, were also present. Where *was* Yesuvahini,[35] Babarao's wife? This was the first question on Savarkar's lips.

His ears were not prepared to hear the answer. Yesuvahini had passed away. Babarao, with his belief in the afterlife, was able to console himself with the thought that her spirit was here with them. Savarkar had not this solace; his soul was heavily burdened. But time was short; with superhuman effort, they talked of other things behind a carefree façade. Savarkar was given half an hour alone with his wife the next day. That was it.

The families of others were permitted to visit for one week, but the "dangerous" Savarkar family must be treated very severely. Even the special gifts brought by their family—hand-embroidered handkerchiefs and favorite goodies—were confiscated. The Savarkars were *not* entitled to any pleasure, apparently!

That evening after lockup Savarkar stood by his door gazing blankly at the ocean. Should he just pretend his beloved Yesuvahini was still alive, far away in mainland India? What difference would it make? He was marooned here for fifty years. But no; reality must be faced. There was no shirking away from the truth, however unpleasant. He must bid good-bye to her and move on.

How carefree and full of mischief were those childhood days. He had always managed to polish off the food she had so carefully hidden for later. He *would* bite off the best top half of the watermelon pieces, under the pretext of keeping them cool under the stars. He had draped himself in a sari and mimicked her as she sang. He had taught her to read and write. She had encouraged his love of poetry, and many a happy hour he had

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35 Vahini: sister-in-law.

spent with her and her friends. How thunderstruck they were at his command over the women's songs!

Yesuvahini, taking the place of his dead mother, had made a home for his family. She was his sanctuary. When Baba was roused into giving him a beating, he quickly took refuge behind her! Baba, traditionally bent, could not approach his wife in public. Well, he had no inhibitions.

"Baba, she is my fortress, my haven. Do you dare touch me now?" he would challenge.

The days of fun and frolic were short-lived. They had both left childhood far, far behind when he was seventeen and she fifteen. Babarao was away when the dreaded plague swept through their home, afflicting both their father and Bal. Scared and terrified, they had somehow nursed the two, night and day, with no thought for their own health. By the time Babarao returned, their father was dead and there was not much hope for Bal. They evacuated their home, taking shelter in a temple on the outskirts of town. Their uncle came to support them, but he too succumbed to the plague. Their dark days of terror were not over yet. They moved Bal to a plague hospital in Nasik. There, while taking tender care of Bal, Babarao came down with plague too. The two terrified youngsters, left alone at home, supported each other. To live in deathly fear for the life of loved ones forges a bond that cannot break. By the grace of God, the two brothers recovered.

This was just the start of their hardships. Surviving without their elders was no easy task. Yesuvahini had to make untold sacrifices, selling even her jewelry, to keep the wolf from their door and to further his education. Despite the money troubles, they had plunged devotedly onto the path to win freedom and honor for their motherland. Yesuvahini was their staunchest ally in their political activities; parallel to their political groups she ran one for the women.

And here he was today, truly living up to his oath of sacrificing his all, even loved ones, for his motherland. Tears were pouring down his cheeks, squeezing through his tightly

shut eyes. They soaked his shirt, but for today he did not turn from them. Today he grieved; tomorrow was another day.

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Coughing helplessly, Babarao stumbled to the hospital wrapped in a coarse black blanket, his body bent almost double with pain. From afar, Savarkar, now back in block 7, watched him with anguished eyes, for his health had completely collapsed. Babarao was attended by the crafty Dr. Ayer. It was Dr. Ayer's policy to be very unsympathetic and harsh with the political prisoners. He was ambitious and believed in currying favor with the British superiors in this manner.

"So, Savarkar, you want a rest in the hospital? Tired of hard labor are you?" Ayer's tone was very offensive.

Babarao tried to be patient. "Doctor, I am coughing incessantly and also have terrible pain in my stomach."

"I am sure it is only a trivial matter. Let me examine you."

Gritting his teeth, Babarao allowed himself to be subjected to an examination, cursory in the extreme.

"Oh, nothing much wrong with you, Savarkar! Stop hamming and go back to your cell," declared Dr. Ayer.

Babarao was incensed; through his pain he cried, "Dr. Ayer, you insult me by such conduct. I shall never again step in this hospital!"

Dr. Ayer was quite taken aback. When word got back to Murray about this, he was severely reprimanded. Babarao's sputum was sent for testing. Eventually a specialist visiting the hospital declared him a tuberculosis patient. But Babarao never did get the treatment required for a full recovery. It was a miracle he was pulling along, ravaged as his body was by the combined effects of TB, migraine, chronic dysentery, and unremitting, inhuman hardships!

Chapter Seven

1919

In early 1918, Gandhi had the people of the Kheda district stage a *satyagraha*[36] protesting the increase in their tax. The Government promptly began to confiscate and sell their property in lieu of the taxes. This made the peasants of Kheda very restive—the Satyagraha was in danger of coming apart at the seams . . . ! Something needed to be done—and fast. On April 29, Gandhi, in a letter to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford, suggested a bargain that if the Government were to relieve him of his Kheda trouble, he would "as a recruiting agent-in-chief, rain men on them" in the war. The Viceroy willingly accepted Gandhi's recruiting services and granted just enough relief to the peasants for Gandhi to make a tall claim of a successful satyagraha and save face . . . ! Then, swiftly discarding his principle of nonviolence, Gandhi began desperately recruiting Indians for the British army.

Ceasefire in WWI was declared on November 18, 1918. India had supported Britain in her war in every possible way—by providing resources, money, ammunition, and manpower. Indians were expecting from Britain, if not outright freedom, at least more say in their government and laws, along with rules more favorable to them. Instead, the Government

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36 Term coined by Gandhi; he gave it the misnomer "soul-force." Literally the word means "insistence on truth." By implication it has come to mean nonviolent civil disobedience.

came down very harshly upon them. The Rowlatt Act came in full force in March 1919. Emergency measures of the Defense of India Regulations Act were indefinitely extended. It vested the Government with extraordinary powers to quell sedition. The press could be silenced. Political activists could be detained without trial. Any individual suspected of sedition or treason could be arrested without warrant. Special Tribunal Courts tried cases, without the presence of the public or press. This sparked a massive outrage. It was intolerable to the Indians. All the national leaders protested stringently. Gandhi called for a nonviolent strike in protest of this abomination.

The Government was severe in response to this strike. Mounted police fired guns into unarmed crowds to disperse the peaceful protesters. This incensed the people into a violent reaction, especially in the Punjab and Gujarat regions. Railway lines were ripped out, telegraph poles were knocked down, and buildings were attacked. The Government reacted with more brutality than ever before. Fire was opened into any crowd, even if they were not rioters. Airplanes were used to throw bombs . . . ! A *war* on unarmed *civilians* . . . ! Thousands of innocent lives were sacrificed.

Gandhi—the British loyalist—made speech after speech deriding the *Indians* for their violent reaction to the British who "may have been a little too free with their weapons"! The brutality of the British was of no consequence to him? The whole violent, vicious might of the British military bombarded against helpless, unarmed Indians, and the would-be-Father of the Nation—the Apostle of Nonviolence—utters not a protest . . . !

These atrocious government acts culminated in a horrendous tragedy perpetrated by Brigadier Dyers, supported by Lieutenant Governor O'Dwyers, in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, on April 10, 1919. Brigadier Dyers and his troop, without any warning, opened fire—until all their ammunition was exhausted—on a peaceful gathering of men, women, and children. The people had no way of escape; the walls of the enclosed ground were too high to climb, and the firing came

from the only exit from it. They were massacred . . . ! Immediate curfew, with shoot-on-sight order, was declared in the city. Not only did Brigadier Dyers not make any arrangements to take the wounded to the hospital or to pick up the dead, but the Indians themselves could not do it either, thanks to the curfew.

This day was followed by several more where harsh treatment was meted out to many, even students and innocent people. They were made to stand for hours in the sun, crawl on their bellies, lick boots, and endure many such humiliating acts.

Indian leaders spoke out in protest of this horror. Rabindranath Tagore, a noted Indian poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, returned his Kaiser-e-Hind medal to the Government. Did Gandhi return his medal, the symbol of the British Imperial Power? No! Instead, he maintained a silence; his only comment on the Jallianwala Bagh atrocities was: "It is admitted that they are unconnected with the Satyagraha Movement"!

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, "has Gandhi been officially declared a mahatma?"[37]

"Yes, Keshu."

"Tatyarao, I shall choke on the word!"

Savarkar laughed. "Well, never mind it then."

"Did you read the snippet extolling Gandhi's achievement in his South African Satyagraha?" continued Keshu.

"People go by the Mahatma's word, Keshu," said Savarkar. "If he says his Satyagraha was successful, they don't doubt him! But in reality what was its achievement? The Indian Relief Act of 1914 merely abolished the £3 poll tax and recognized the marriages performed by traditional Indian rites. The Indians were *still* disenfranchised and not allowed to own property in the two former Boer republics or to live in the Orange Free State. *All* the restrictions on Indian trading remained in force. And what is more, shortly after Gandhi's return to India, even

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37 A great soul. The word was generally applied to spiritual leaders, god-men.

these minor concessions were taken back . . . ! As for racial discrimination of the locals—he never did protest against it!"

"But Tatyarao, why can everyone not see the truth?" cried Keshu helplessly. "At the very least, they should not be blind to the reality of what is going on in our motherland! So much violence, so much bloodshed—so many Indians have died, and no one cares . . . ! These very same British sent *you* here for fifty years just for supplying twenty pistols to India! How much punishment should *they* deserve for their crime? And nonviolent Gandhi says not a word in protest!"

"Keshu, Gandhi's nonviolence is advocated to the Hindus only. His whimsy to shame the British government into giving us freedom can *never* work; their cultural and moral fiber is not the same as ours. Far from experiencing shame, they use the full power of their tremendous military might *and* make and change the laws to vanquish us. For Indians to meekly submit to these, to accept the laws manufactured expressly to maintain our slave status, is to sin against our motherland!"

"I wish Indians would understand this simple fact, Tatyarao!"

"Yes, so do I! Our scriptures say *ahimsa paramo dharmah, dharma himsa tathaiva ca*—'nonviolence is the highest principle, *and so is violence in defense of the righteous*'"—Savarkar jumped up and paced restlessly—"Gandhi is advocating *only* the first part of this precept to the Indians and is completely disregarding the latter part that completes it! It is a *gross* distortion of the truth—and harmful to the success of our freedom movement."

"How enamored are the Hindus by the words 'nonviolence' and 'love' and 'soul-force'!"

"Confusion in words, Keshu," said Savarkar grimly, "leads to confusion in thoughts. And Gandhi's words have much confusion! He equates truth to nonviolence and nonviolence to love and soul-force! His 'truth,' which punishes the innocent—the Indians—and spares the guilty—the British—is no real truth!"

"Why *can't* the Hindus see through this confusion? *Tcha!*" said Keshu, frustrated. "Passive, nonviolent resistance is effective

when there is at least some form of constitution to protect one's right; when the ones in power have *some* limit to the violence they will perpetrate on the victims!"

"Gandhi won over the hearts of the Hindu masses by the spiritual approach. Now that he is declared a mahatma, his every word is gospel! This blind faith is a peculiarity of the Hindus." Savarkar stopped pacing and sank down on the floor. "Now the role of our other national leaders is crucial, Keshu, *crucial*!"

"Oh, Tatyarao, why doesn't any leader teach the Indians by historical example?"

"Yes, Keshu, the American Revolution would be perfect! The Americans went for passive resistance and boycotted British goods. But they were prepared to back their ultimatum with arms! *They*, like true patriots, declared independence and wrested their freedom from Britain with an armed revolt!"

"Oh to be free, Tatyarao, to be free . . . !"

"Vande Mataram!"[38]

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The Cellular Jail was again being flocked by political prisoners from Punjab and Gujarat. The stories they had to report of cruelty, violence, and humiliation were shocking in the extreme. They were, of course, immediately absorbed into all the programs that Savarkar had established. Being mostly from the peasant class, they were not too keen on the education program, now fondly called Nalanda University.[39] Oftentimes Savarkar had to chase after them with slate and pencil.

Two of his toughest pupils were Jiva from Gujarat and Pawan Singh from Punjab. Over and over Savarkar had to teach Jiva the Gujarati alphabet. Though a very willing pupil, he just

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38 "Salute to the Motherland," the opening line of Bankim Chandra Chatterji's poem which became the slogan of the Indian freedom movement. The poem inspired many Indians to become patriotic.

39 Famous ancient Buddist University in India.

could not grasp it. But success was theirs, after forty patient lessons! Pawan Singh on the other hand was quite a rogue. He did not even attempt the lesson unless he was paid by a succa. One day he went a step further.

"Babuji, I am so tired today," he said, swiftly popping the tobacco in his mouth. "I don't think I can focus on my studies."

"Pawan Singh, you know you can do it," said Savarkar patiently. "Come on now, have I not paid your price?"

"But, babuji, I need more energy! A big fellow like me needs more sustenance." He looked askance at Savarkar, slyly. "Perhaps today you can give me the milk that comes specially for you from the hospital?"

"If that is what it takes, you may have it, Pawan Singh," Savarkar agreed readily. "But lessons first!"

"Oh yes, certainly, babuji! Here is my slate." With gleaming eyes, he began to practice his writing.

Savarkar turned to go. Hardly had he gone a distance when Pawan Singh's singing floated to his ears:

"The babuji is duped, oh yes,
Duped is the gentleman babuji."

Savarkar was very much amused by this. Often they would play this game together, and if ever Savarkar wanted to hear the couplet again he had to pay a second bribe of succa!

Keshu, when he got to know of this, was incensed. "Tatyarao, how dare Pawan Singh mock you! If he were not more than twice my age, I would thrash him for sure for this impertinence!"

"Keshu, how impetuous you are!" laughed Savarkar. "I would not at all be pleased with you. I find him quite amusing. Look at all the trials he has been through. He even has the scars to prove it. And *yet* he retains the child in him! It is not an easy achievement."

"Perhaps I can give him a stern rebuke?"

But Savarkar was shaking his head.

"Just a little gentle hint, then?"

"No, Keshu, not at all. Long, long ago I was a mischievous child full of pranks and fun. I have bid good-bye to that part of me, but I do appreciate it in others. You shall leave him alone!"

Keshu subsided, unhappily. To distract him, Savarkar went on, "How are the wrestling classes coming along?"

"Oh, Tatyarao, that was such a good idea!" cried Keshu, perking up. "We are lucky indeed to have two great exponents of that science here."

Their Sundays were so very different now from those early days. They sang patriotic songs openly; sometimes everyone compared scars. Almost all who had come recently had whips scars or at least one gunshot wound decorating their body. Savarkar always spoke of them with great pride.

"Behold our soldiers and their medals! They are more precious, more honestly won than those of gold. But with all this, freedom is not near! More bloodshed and suffering, tremendous sacrifice will yet be needed for Mother India to be free."

"Why bloodshed, babuji?" exclaimed one. "Mahatmaji has promised us freedom without violence."

"Brothers, has he promised that the British will put down *their* arms? No! Instead, the British have brought bombs and guns into our homes, shooting children, women, and the elderly too! Our blood is being shed! But don't worry, freedom will be ours! Do we want to live in a country where arbitrary laws are passed? Where is the justice in that? We will not be living in humiliation, bound by the capricious whim of those in power. No! We shall not!"

Years later in 1948, these very words of his were to come back and haunt him in free India!

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The Treaty of Versailles was signed in June 1919. Much to the indignation of the Indian Muslims, the Turkish Empire was effectively cut up and distributed between the Allies. Even in his home territory, the Caliph had only nominal powers. The propagandist of the Turkish Caliphate in India decided to force Britain into changing her policy for Turkey. The Khilafat Movement was born.

Gandhi, rather than fight for the much bigger and national issue of Indian freedom or even protest against the horrific behavior of the British military and police against the helpless Indians, at this point decided to make the Turkish cause his own—and willy-nilly dragged the Indian freedom movement behind him!

Was Britain's treatment of Turkey a greater horror, a greater degradation, to the Indians than her treatment of India?

November 1919: Gandhi, as the President of the Khilafat committee, asserted that noncooperation with the Government was the way to go; though, he declared, that it was premature to ask the Indians in the British army—a majority of whom were Muslims—to join in! What better way is there to bring an empire to its knees than by crippling its army? Had not India just seen how harshly the British used this very army against peaceful agitators? How they used Indians against Indians? Why *not* ask the soldiers to join the noncooperation? *Why* not? Was it his loyalty to the British imperialism?

Almost at the same time as this, Gandhi, in his role as Mahatma to the Indians, in the Congress meeting at Amritsar, advocated supporting the newly passed government reforms! How was he going to pull this off? Noncooperation and cooperation at one and the same time!

1920

"Baba, do you feel a bit better?" Savarkar asked with concern.

"Forget it, Tatya. What chance of reprieve is there in this hellish spot? Let us not talk of it."

A fit of coughing consumed him. Savarkar watched in distress, patting Babarao's back gently until it passed. Babarao's hardships had left him more dead than alive—but his spirit burned strong. His Hindustan needed him.

"Tatya . . . Tatya . . . I am very concerned about the situation in Hindustan. Gandhi is dragging the Khilafat question into national politics as well."

"Baba, Gandhi has no political vision to speak of! He has failed to realize that if the 'vital interests' of a group of Muslims are bound up in a state and society far, far beyond the boundaries of India, how can they form a true unit of the Indian State? To encourage this is to create division among the Indians."

"And yet he talks of Hindu-Muslim unity, Tatya. He has gone as far as to say that he does not want 'self-rule' without first achieving this unity! Isn't the freedom struggle hard enough without him putting these impediments in the way? Who is he working for—the British?"

Savarkar curled his hands into two tight fists. "Why has he taken up the Khilafat cause at all?" It was a cry from the heart. "The Turks are very capably dealing with their issues. And why bemoan the loss of the Turkish Empire? Why support yet *another* imperialist, the Ottoman Empire? Did they not massacre thousands of innocent Armenians? He may brush it away as rumors but was there not genocide? The principle of nonviolence was grossly offended!"

"You know, Tatya, Gandhi pushes his nonviolence only on the Hindus . . . but listen to this—" another bout of coughing wracked Babarao's frame "—in his magazine, *Young India*, he writes: 'The Muslims have special Koranic obligations in which Hindus *may* or may not join—'"

"Koranic obligations . . . ! Baba, but that is jihad!"

"Yes, Tatya, yes!"

"He is approving *jihad*—violence!—*and* allowing the Hindus to participate in it?" asked Savarkar incredulously.

"Listen to the rest of it, Tatya: 'They, therefore, reserve to themselves, in the event of the failure of noncooperation, in order to

enforce justice to resort to *all such methods* as may be enjoined by Islamic scriptures.' There you see!"

"Good God! Why *doesn't* he advise the Hindus to pick up arms for *their* freedom, for justice for Hindustan, then?"

"Who knows, Tatya, who knows? But it is certainly disastrous to be diverting the freedom movement into these other channels!"

"He will drive it into a ditch. Our only dependence now is on Tilak. Oh, Baba, if only we were *free*!"

"Not much chance of that, Tatya! We pose a great danger to the British. On the other hand, they must be *thrilled* with Gandhi's politics! It practically consolidates their position!"

They sat silently for a while. Then Babarao said, "Tatya, the Jail Petition Committee will be here soon. Are you going to talk to them? You know, of course, that putting grievances before the committee will surely adversely affect your chances of release?"

"Very possibly, Baba, very possibly! But I *know* I can put the case of the thousands of prisoners and their suffering very effectively—better than anyone else here, perhaps. So I *must* do it."

* * *

There came a day when a Chinese convict was brought here for drug trafficking. He had heard of Savarkar. At the first opportunity he asked, "You big man . . . Savalkal?" His eyes were huge with wonder.

"Yes, I am Savarkar," replied Savarkar, amused.

"But you velly small!"

He apparently believed that a great man like Savarkar should have an impressive height and breadth.

He poked Savarkar in the chest. "You feel pain? Bullet bounce off your body, maybe?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course not! It will go through me just like anyone else."

The man was deeply disappointed. "No . . . no! You *gleat* man! How many days and nights you swim in sea?"

"At Marseilles you mean? I was in the sea for only ten minutes or so!"

The man's disillusionment in the greatness of men was complete. Here was this tiny man, quite vulnerable, trapped in this small cell—what can be his claim to greatness? Even his daring escape was only a ten-minute swim! Never again would he believe in the daring-dos of heroes! The man shook his head sorrowfully and took leave.

A few days later Keshu was before Savarkar. "Tatyarao, there is a Chinese man going around telling everyone how he was hoaxed into believing you were a hero," said Keshu, gnashing his teeth. "I set him straight on a few points! I don't think he will dare make such snide statements again."

Savarkar laughed. "Keshu, I cannot hope to win everyone's devotion. Alas, I am but a midget—not everyone's idea of what a hero should be! But what to do?"

"Well, he is an ignorant one, certainly! Tatyarao, there is a lot of talk going around of us getting amnesty. Is it true, do you think?"

"I hope so, Keshu. I hope so. Hindustan needs us all! Vande Mataram!"

The following Sunday, Savarkar had more proof of the credulity of simple people.

"Badebabu," said one such, "the Mahatma is a powerful yogi! He can get *swaraj*[40] for us in a year! The British are helpless against him. Bullets cannot hurt him! He wields such magic; he can vanish from his cell at will and appear outside."

Had he been sharing views on great men with the Chinese man, perhaps?

"Yes, certainly Mahatmaji appears outside the prison wall—on the day of his release!" replied Savarkar tartly.

One day, Babarao got a glimpse into the confusion created by Gandhism. Parikh, a devout Gandhian, was Babarao's cell

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40 Self-rule.

neighbor. Babarao found him putting a plate with bugs out in the sun. It was very strange.

"Parikh, what are you doing?"

"Babarao, these bugs have harassed me all night. I am hoping the sun will destroy them."

"Surely killing them is more effective?"

"What! Kill . . . ! Go against Mahatmaji's principles! I cannot commit an act of violence."

"Are you saying that it is permissible, by your principles, to inflict an indirect death? That it is then *not* a violent act? Surely causing pain and suffering before inflicting death is a greater act of violence, a greater sin? Come, Parikh, don't be foolish. Kill them and be done!"

But poor Parikh was simply unable to see the reasoning. He gave the bugs to Babarao to kill. After four days of this nonsense Babarao had had enough.

"Parikh, you are not absolved of responsibility just because you make *me* do the actual killing. In fact, it magnifies your sin! This warped idea of nonviolence is a mental weakness! Get rid of that and your dilemma will be no more."

* * *

Barrie's tenure in the Cellular Jail was coming to an end. It was his time to retire to Ireland. His health had deteriorated considerably. When the time came for him to board the ship, he had to be carried aboard by two men. He breathed his last on the shores of India.

Mirza, too, had lost his supremacy in the jail. He was stricken by atrophy in the hand. He obsessed that he was cursed for all the injustice he had heaped on the Hindus. Only Savarkar could cure him of this malady, he believed. He sent a message to Savarkar: "Forgive me for my sins. I am sure all will be well with my hand then." He told everyone, "Please, beg him to restore the feeling in my hand. Let him do me this kind turn."

Savarkar tried to turn him from this fixation. "Mirza, I have nothing to do with your ailment. I have no magic. I do not even believe in such things."

"Badababu, you must save me; you must. You are great; you are powerful! Forgive me."

"Mirza, your medication will cure you."

But he was unshakable in his belief.

"I have faith in you, badababu; only you can do it."

"If my forgiveness means so much to you, Mirza, I can sincerely tell you that I bear you no ill will. May God cure you!"

Mirza fell at his feet sobbing. Not long after, his hand started recovering sensation in it. To Mirza it was proof that Savarkar had done the trick!

* * *

In India the National Union collected a mammoth seventy thousand signatures, including those of representative leaders of all the provinces of India, on a petition demanding the release of all political prisoners. It was the Government's contention that revolutionaries were frowned upon by Indians and not looked upon as patriots. This petition proved it wrong.

Soon enough, general amnesty was granted to several of them here but not unconditionally. They had to sign a pledge refraining from any political activity for a specified time. This offended most of them. It was an infringement upon their rights! A slur upon their patriotism! Sign a pledge? *Never!* Savarkar was very heartened to see that despite all their sufferings, they were still such staunch patriots. Such Sons of India should definitely be free to fight for their country!

"Brothers, there is nothing wrong in signing this pledge. Sign it and be free—free to work for the freedom of our motherland."

"Tatyarao, with the signing of this pledge our hands are tied! It forbids us to do just that very thing."

"Ah, but do you have to follow its dictate?" asked Savarkar passionately. "*No!* A pledge imposed upon us by a foreign enemy power is worth only the paper it is written on. There is no reason to stay committed to it! It is merely a means to an end—only an avenue to break the locks of this jail."

"But that would be deceitful, Tatyarao!"

"Deceitful to whom?" exclaimed Savarkar. "When we have no constitutional rights and are crushed into subjugation by arbitrary laws of an enemy power, honesty as you mean it is not a luxury we can indulge in!"—he raised the palms of his hands—"the *only* honesty and truth for us is reinstating the honor of our beloved Hindustan. We follow any path that circumstances force us to take. If the British rule us by unlawful means, we go against this law of theirs to gain freedom. When under duress we make petitions and even sign pledges!"

"Yes, Tatyarao, there is much in what you say. But it still seems cowardly to sign such papers. The blood of heroes like Shivaji flows in our veins! What, shall we supplicate before the enemy? History will label us as cowards and hypocrites!"

"We cannot swerve from our path by fear of adverse public opinion! Shivaji was *very* brave indeed. Yet when needed, he took a conciliatory position with Aurangzeb. At one time, Shivaji suffered many losses from the mighty Mughal forces led by Mirza Raja Jaisingh and Dilerkhan. He made a small capitulation and signed the Treaty of Purandar. He was forced to hand over to Aurangzeb many forts and go to Agra. Here he was treacherously imprisoned by Aurangzeb. Shivaji sent petition after petition professing loyalty to him, all the while planning his escape! It was his strategic move to lull the enemy. Can Shivaji be accused of cowardice? Change of heart? Never! We must also admire the forethought with which he killed the mighty Afzal Khan by ripping open his stomach with the tiger claws. If he had not broken his promise of being unarmed in that meeting, Afzal Khan's plot to crush him to death would have been successful!"

"Tatyarao, indeed, we did not see it in this light."

"Who can dispute the word of our Lord Shri Krishna?" Savarkar continued. "His whole life is an illustration of diplomacy and strategic skills! When Jarasandha was wreaking havoc in Mathura, the time was not right to vanquish him. Shri Krishna retreated west to a new land, Dwarka. He established a strong kingdom and, at an opportune moment, had Jarasandha killed. Let us, too, use strategy to be free. There is no advantage in being caged here. Mother India needs just such staunch patriotic sons as you. Vande Mataram!"

One and all were convinced and the pledges duly signed. The gates of the Cellular Jail were thrown open. These brave, heroic men walked all the way to the pier singing patriotic songs. Such was their devotion to their motherland! It took over a year to repatriate them all. One of the earliest batches included Wamanrao. The Savarkar brothers were, of course, refused amnesty. Not even a day of their sentence was reduced. Keshu had no intimation as yet what his fate was to be.

Tragedy struck on August 1. Tilak breathed his last. The news filtered into the Cellular Jail immediately. Savarkar was shattered by the loss of this great national leader. At any time this would be a great affliction for his heart, but now it was a catastrophe! Now Gandhi was given free rein. It would certainly set the freedom movement back by several years and do untold damage besides.

Savarkar's soul was in torment.

* * *

Hari Singh and Kripal Singh were revolutionaries who had had warrants issued out in their names in India. They had successfully avoided the law. Then they had the misfortune to meet Gandhi. They often bemoaned their fate to Savarkar.

"Babuji, when will we be set free from here? Why, oh why, did we ever fall in with Mahatmaji's order?" wailed Hari Singh. "Kripal, how well we were doing our work, hiding so cleverly from the law."

"Babuji," said Kripal Singh, "one day we found ourselves in the same town as Mahatmaji. We thought it would be an honor to see him. *Hai!*[41] Unfortunately we told him all about our warrant and being in hiding from the law."

"Oh, the Great One was so enraged with us!" continued Hari Singh. "He told us that it was cowardice to evade the law. We were quite perplexed. I asked him outright, 'Surely, Mahatmaji, not recognizing their authority, making their law inoperative is the best possible civil disobedience? We are carrying on our work, so you cannot accuse us of being afraid. To do as you say—to let the alien law have its way with us—*that* would be cooperating with the Government, isn't it?' But, babuji, the Mahatma did not even hear us out. He ordered us to surrender ourselves instantly to the magistrate, and here we are now!"

"Oh, what a foolish advice we took!"

"Hari Singh, Kripal Singh, you had the weakness to obey him implicitly, even against your better judgment. You are as much to blame as the Mahatma for your predicament!" said Savarkar. "To the Mahatma, the *end* is not important; the *means* are paramount. But of what use are the means that do not, and *cannot*, take you to your goal? He equates going to jail with patriotism, but this trussed-up and helpless patriotism cannot wrest freedom from the British!"

"Babuji, why are his ideas so popular, then?"

"The Mahatma has mastered the art of sugarcoating his ideas, just like the bitter pill. They glide down the throat and people digest them without the least idea what they have consumed!"

"Is noncooperation wrong, then?"

"No, but it should be rightly applied. The Mahatma is advocating noncooperation in the wrong areas. Why boycott the legislative posts and schools? These are our only avenues to further national interest. Let the Indian soldiers and police resort to noncooperation—then the might of the British will

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41 Exclamation of lament.

be a damp squib! The Mahatma's policies are bound to lead to fanaticism and confusion in the country, with consequences too terrible to contemplate."

* * *

Keshu was now working in the gardens again, living from one day to the next. It was more than six months since the repatriation of prisoners had commenced, and here they still were. He had come to believe that neither the Savarkar brothers nor he would be set free before their time. This acceptance brought a modicum of peace to his mind. His childhood was just a hazy memory; the grim reality of prison life had colored all his thoughts. Now a cautious dream flowered in his imagination. His seven years were up, and sooner or later the authorities were bound to allow him a ticket for free living on the island. They must surely do the same for Tatyarao too? They could be neighbors. Tatyarao's family would come here. Perhaps he would have a family of his own. They would happily serve their country and community from here. To spend his life devotedly serving Tatyarao, helping him in his work, was all he asked from life. He was hoping that he would be sent back to the Cellular Jail soon. It was many days since he had seen or spoken to Tatyarao.

September 7: Keshu looked up from the garden he was tending. There was the *Maharaja*, swaying gently while at anchor. She was to sail tomorrow. The sound of running feet made him turn. Raghu was loping toward him.

"Babu, babu!"

"Slow down, Raghu! What is the excitement?"

"You have been granted amnesty! You are free! Tomorrow you sail."

For a moment, Keshu just stood and blinked. "It is just another rumor, like always."

"No, babu, it is the absolute truth. No kidding. Are you not ecstatic?"

Keshu's mind was elsewhere. "Who else is leaving? Tatyarao? Babarao?"

"No, babu. They are here to stay, it seems. I have made arrangements for you to receive a set of clothes. You will need them for tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" queried Keshu dazedly.

"Babu, what is wrong with you? The *Maharaja* sails tomorrow. You will be leaving with her!"

"Leave without even seeing Tatyarao! That cannot be. Raghu, you must make some arrangement for me to go in the jail. You simply *must*!" Keshu was quite distraught.

"Babu, it is madness to risk all now! I will not let you jeopardize this chance. Badebabuji wouldn't want it, either! You are free, do you hear, *free*!"

Keshu was shaking his head. They argued hotly, but there was no real option for Keshu. He was leaving. Tomorrow. Without Tatyarao—no farewell, no last glimpse. That was the stark reality.

"Go, Raghu, I wish to be alone," clipped out Keshu. He was trying hard to get a grip on himself.

Raghu left, throwing occasional puzzled looks behind him at Keshu. How strange were these babus! Now if he were given amnesty, he would be turning cartwheels with glee!

Amnesty . . . ! How I have yearned for it, thought Keshu. *But to leave Tatyarao, my beloved guru behind . . . !* That had been, still was, inconceivable. What would be Tatyarao's fate here? How would they treat him? Would his health hold out? Would he even see his Tatyarao again? What would be his life now without the guidance of his guru? These questions whirled round and round in his brain. He was disconsolate. There was no euphoria in the thought of freedom. Far, far from it. His mother, his uncle, his aunt, and cousins were all wispy figures wavering on the horizon of his consciousness. Very unreal!

All day he retreated to a turbulent corner of his mind. Many gave him strange looks. *Was he granted amnesty or a*

death sentence? they wondered. *Why the long face?* Keshu was oblivious to it all.

The next morning, with leaden feet he boarded the *Maharaja*. Agonizing pain squeezed his heart. Head turned back, he searched the far away, majestic façade of the Cellular Jail with desperate, seeking eyes. *Oh Tatyarao . . . !* One rough, quick shove from unseen hands—and in he went into the belly of the *Maharaja*. Homeward bound!

Chapter Eight

September 1920, Poona

Keshu stood on the entrance steps of the Poona railway station—the very same steps he had stood on seven long years ago, only so much had changed now. Should he, perhaps, take a *tonga*[42] to his uncle's home? He had some money. But he felt unable to move. Much of his heart and soul was with Savarkar back in Andaman. The days gone by in travelling had not lessened that pain. Now he was to meet his family. Would he be able to behave normally? Would his prison experience color his actions, his perceptions? How gladly he had read his uncle's yearly letters! How much ease to his heart they had given. Why then be so hesitant, so undecided now? Why was he not overflowing with joy and happiness? A few more days and he would see his mother too. How she must have suffered! She surely had given up hope of ever seeing him again.

Suddenly, a tonga came racing toward the steps. Just like a replay of that first time! Out jumped a bright young man looking straight up at Keshu. Keshu reeled and clutched the column at his side. Damu . . . surely that was Damu . . . *alive!* But no . . . no, this was a very young man. Keshu couldn't take his eyes off the man's face, so dear yet not quite the same.

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42 Horse carriage.

"Namaskar,"[43] said the young man with a tentative smile. "I am Vidyadhar Phadke"—*cousin Vidu! How he had grown . . . and so like Damu!*—"just this morning my father was informed of your coming. I am here to take you home."

"Namaskar," said Keshu. What more should he say?

Vidu gave him one more hesitant smile. "Shall we go?"

"Yes . . . yes, let us go."

An awkward silence reigned in the tonga as it sped along. Keshu was in the grip of an overpowering emotion. He gazed blankly at the passing scenery, hands clutching the edge of the seat in a vice. Vidu, alarmed by this remote and forbidding stranger, fidgeted a bit, even tried to speak a couple of times. But one look at Keshu, and the words dried up at the onset.

With much relief, Vidu jumped out of the tonga in his front yard. His father would know what to do. Madhavrao had been pacing the porch restlessly, tugging at his magnificent mustaches every so often. His normal stately manner was quite, quite missing. His Keshu—home again after such a long a time. It hardly seemed possible. Oh, how very lean he was. So taciturn and remote did he appear! Jail life was bound to have changed him. Madhavrao made a move to clasp Keshu in an embrace.

Quickly Keshu forestalled him. "Namaskar, Madhavrao!"

Madhavrao, not Mama![44] thought Madhavrao with a pang, forgetting Keshu's new identity for a moment. How difficult it was going to be to keep up that pretense.

"Namaskar, Keshu."

Radhabai,[45] Madhavrao's wife, could hardly wait to get Keshu indoors. There she caught him in a tight embrace, shedding many tears down his chest. Keshu held her plump frame rather awkwardly. Sensing his discomfort Radhabai pulled away, wiping her tears.

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43 A salutation.

44 Maternal uncle.

45 Bai: lady; also used as a suffix out of respect.

"*Arre*[46] Keshu, how silly of me to cry on this joyous occasion!"—she led him by the hand—"let us go to the living room."

Keshu lowered himself on the divan. It was so very strange to be sitting on a plush mattress. A picture of Savarkar sitting cross-legged on the bare ground flashed across his eyes. He took a big, long, shuddering breath. Really, he had to pull himself together. It wasn't fair to his family to be falling apart like this. Perhaps he should make some general observations and set the ball rolling.

"Madhavrao, is Damu . . . Damu . . . ?" *Oh God! Where had those words come from?* But it had to be asked.

"Damu passed away that fateful day, Keshu," said Madhavrao quietly.

The painful truth . . . after so many years! *Oh Damu, Damu . . . !* A fresh pain swamped him. Here, in Damu's home, the clock was turning back. An awkward silence spread across the room.

There was a soft patter of footsteps. A black cat, tail swishing and up, came running and stopped a few feet away. Twin green fires were aimed at Keshu. With one bounding leap, the cat jumped onto his shoulder, rubbing her cheek against his.

"Chingi! Chingi! Surely it is her!" He buried his face in her fur. "She remembers me!"

The ice that had enshrined his heart cracked. Still holding Chingi, he went to his uncle, tears rolling down his cheeks. "Mama, I'm sorry I am being so . . . so . . . ." He broke off on a sob.

Madhavrao hugged him. Tears were rolling down his cheeks too. "Keshu—it's okay, bal, it's *okay*. The years have been very unkind to you. We have you back, that's all that matters."

"I want to go home and see Ma. Soon. She has waited too long already."

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46 An exclamation, usually of surprise.

"We'll have to arrange for your clothes and such things. We'll move things as fast as we can. Radhe's brother can help you board the steamer in Bombay."

Keshu gripped his uncle's hand tightly.

A little later, Radhabai was ushering them into the dining area. It was a bit of an ordeal to be seated on Radhabai's polished *paat*[47] eating out of her solid silver plates. It was just too much after the austerity of Cellular Jail. The food quite stuck in his throat to think that Savarkar was still being subjected to those horrors and he was here in the lap of luxury. How was he to enjoy this lavish style of living? Was it all even necessary? Who would have imagined that homecoming would be quite so agonizing?

Keshu stayed there for only two days. He was still uncomfortable but managed to put on a good mask. He had never been garrulous. Everyone was so happy to have him back. The boys, Vidyadhar, Gangadhar, and Shridhar, appeared so grown up and not at all mischievous as he remembered. He wasn't the only one who had changed.

He spent a lot of time taking lonely walks. For hours he sat by the temple atop Hanuman *Tekdi*,[48] where he had taken his Abhinav Bharat oath. His thoughts were shuttling between Savarkar, his mother, and Damu until his head ached with the pain of it all. He longed for the ease of his mother's love. All the memories he had blocked out were rushing back. He would go to Pongur and just wallow in the peace and quiet of life there until he found his feet.

Pongur

Keshu walked to his front porch at a brisk lope. Here not much had changed. Still the same peaceful-looking house tucked within the mantle of coconut palms. The front door

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47 Very low stools.

48 Hill.

was wide open, as usual. He could almost see his mother seated inside in the front hall, reading her Bhagavad Gita. Suddenly, he couldn't wait anymore. Dropping his case on the path, he ran to the door. There was his mother! Just the way he had pictured; still beautiful but older and very, very sad. Her right hand was absently toying with the page of the Gita. She wasn't so much reading as staring blankly at the book.

"Ma-a-a . . . !" Keshu cried out.

Mohini uttered a convulsive sob and buried her face in her hands. Her shoulders were shaking, her crying just quiet whimpers. Keshu threw himself on the ground beside her and put his arms tightly around her. Mohini jerked out of her trance. She stared in dazed wonder, hardly daring to believe her eyes.

"Keshu . . . ! Keshu, is that really you?" Her hand stroked his cheek. "Did you call out to me? I thought I was dreaming! I have heard you call me so often . . . . I have hoped . . . dreamed . . . of this every day these past years."

Silently, they held on to each other tightly. The moment was too poignant for immediate conversation.

"Keshubal," said Mohini, recovering a bit, "come, let us be comfortable. I want my eyes to get a good fill of you. How they have thirsted for this sight!"

Keshu swallowed hard and gripped her hand.

Once seated on the divan, Mohini asked, "How did they treat you, my son? It has been a torture . . . not to know . . . to imagine . . ."

Keshu covered her mouth with his fingers. "Please, Ma, not that. I am here now. Let us just rejoice in that. I can't talk about the jail life. I cannot."

"It was that Savarkar who brainwashed you! Even from jail he hoodwinks innocent boys—"

Keshu shot up. "Ma, *enough*! Not a word more about Savarkar!"

Mohini was shocked into silence. How very forbidding Keshu looked.

"I will not stay in a home where Savarkar's name is not taken with respect! We shall not talk of him if you prefer but tolerate vile spouted against him . . . *never!*"

"Keshu! You are not back two minutes and you talk of leaving. You will leave *me* for him? Again?"

"Yes."

"Yes? That's it, Keshu? Just like that—*yes*! After all these years of waiting and pining for you—"

Mohini buried her face in her hands and sobbed piteously. For a moment Keshu stood apart, hands clenched at his sides, eyes burning with anger. Slowly, he relaxed. This was his mother. It was too much to expect her to share his feelings, especially right now. Time would heal some of her wounds, maybe. She had suffered a lot at his hands. He would have to condone some things—but never an insult to Tatyarao!

"Ma, must we grill each other?" He sat down beside his mother again. "I am here and to stay. I have no immediate plans. I just want to stay in peace and quiet. Throwing past accusations will do nothing but harm. No matter what, the past years have left a mark, a deep gouge. Let us start afresh—one day at a time." He laughed bitterly. "That I have learned to do very well."

"Oh Keshu!" exclaimed Mohini. "Yes we will do that, certainly. I pictured your homecoming millions of times . . . but . . . but the reality is so different!" She wiped her eyes. "I have no wish to quarrel with you. We must both have forbearance with each other. Come, get freshened up. Are you hungry?"

Later that night, Keshu lay tossing on his bed. His thoughts, his feelings, the soft mattress, everything was making sleep elusive. It had been the same at his uncle's house. Finally, he threw his sheet on the floor and dossed down there. That was more like it. He cradled his head on his arms and stared at the ceiling, willing sleep to come. The door opened softly. Mohini was shocked to see Keshu on the floor.

"Keshu! Keshu!"

"Yes, Ma?" Keshu got up.

"Why are you on the floor?"

"Ma, I am used to the hard surface; the mattress is too fine."

"You are home now. You must get used to normal life. Come, sleep on the bed."

She was insistent, and Keshu decided not to make a fuss. When he was settled, Mohini enquired, "Shall I sing to you as I used to when you were little?"

"Let us talk a little instead, Ma. There are a few things I want to know"—Mohini looked at him expectantly—"Ma, you know I am Pulakeshiraj Soman now officially, don't you?"

Mohini tightened her lips. "Yes, Keshu! It is a terrible thing . . . ! What! You are not to be my son anymore?"

"I could not allow others to pay the price of my actions, Ma. It is a small enough sacrifice. But what story have you told everyone? I can hardly pass myself off as Pulakeshiraj here!"

"Yes. Your uncle thought of that. Here we have told everyone you were studying in Poona. In Poona we said you died. Fortunately, there is not too much traffic of people from here to there. The communities are different too. It is unbearable, the stories we are making up!"

"Why didn't you say I had died and be done with it? It seems less risky than these contrary stories."

Mohini looked at him fiercely. "I would not agree to that, Keshu! How could you ever come home if I said that? I never gave up hope that they might release you early. What else did I have to go on with? If you came back, I would have to be a stranger to you. And where would I meet you? At your mama's house? Impossible!"

"But didn't people wonder why I never visited you?" Keshu cried.

"What people, Keshu, *what* people? And no one *wonders* about a widow either! Has even your father's family ever shown an interest in you or me? But your mama did arrange for me to receive fake letters. And I traveled to Poona, supposedly to be with you."

"You went to Poona . . . !" exclaimed Keshu in utmost surprise. "But . . . but you would never leave this house before."

"Keshu, what in our life is as before? Everything has changed." She shook her head sorrowfully. "If I wanted to keep you alive in Calicut, I had to make that trip. If only I had come with you to Poona that time, as you asked . . . if only!"

"Ma, I do not regret what I did at all. Yes, I am sorry for the trouble I caused everyone. But for our country we must do it. Some sacrifice has to be made. It is pointless to look back."

Silent tears were rolling down Mohini's cheeks. She swiped them off with the back of her hand. "I will try, Keshu, I will try."

For a while they sat in silence. Keshu held on to his mother's hand as she sat head bowed. He had served her a bad turn. How infinitely more difficult her life had become. As a widow she was living a secluded, retired life of an outcast already!

"Ma, how is Duttakaka?"

Mohini looked up quickly and then away. Dutta was Keshu's paternal uncle. It was when he had discovered, seven years ago, that his mother was having an affair with Dutta that his mother had decided to send him to Madhavrao.

"He is fine, Keshu. He still takes care of me . . . but . . . we are not together anymore."

"What! But why not . . . ?"

"Keshu, my son, you were banished in hell for twenty-five years. You were gone before I even heard of it!" She looked up, her eyes burning into his. "All the joy went out of my life! It was my punishment for the sin I committed with Dutta. I could do it no more."

"Ma, oh Ma! You didn't think that! Why, I wrote to you and told you I was sorry to be judgmental. All this time I took solace in the fact that Duttakaka was there to comfort you."

"Keshu, life is not that convenient. You did what you thought right. I had to go by my conscience."

There was a silence again—heavy with sorrow.

"Keshu, let me sing for you. Let us distract our minds."

August-September 1921

Almost a year later, on the morning of August 22, Keshu was exercising at the gym, a new one. This one was across the river in Calicut city proper. It was a bit of a walk, but he welcomed that. What did he have to occupy his time anyway? He led a very, very quiet life. The complexity of his situation, his double identity, demanded that he do that. Exposure was a real threat. Fortunately, he had never been on visiting terms with his family; his close friend, Vishnu, had moved away too. There was no need to seek out anyone else. The gym was about the only public place he went to now. Mostly, he read, talked to his mother, or wandered around in the lush vegetation around his home.

They lived six miles away from Calicut, on the outskirts of a little village, Pongur, near the Kallia estuary. The whole area was beautiful. Birds abounded. Small waterfalls cascaded gently into the main stream from little outcrops of rocks here and there. The monsoon had brought more greenery to the luxuriant growth. It was a soothing balm to his troubled heart and mind.

He had not kept up much with the political news. His uncle passed on anything of importance by letters. Gandhi had returned his war medal to the Government—in support of the Khilafat cause . . . ! The Noncooperation Movement was in full swing with Gandhi at the helm, steering the path. He had, by virtue of his charisma, reconciled the Congress to pass a resolution in support of noncooperation, thereby eluding his dilemma of having to pursue two opposing schemes. To cover all such flip-flopping, Gandhi had publicly quoted: "My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statement but to be consistent with the truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment." The fate of India was now in the whimsical hands of the fifty-one-year-old Gandhi driven by this changeable "truth." He had made it quite clear that the Khilafat Movement was the mainstay of

the Noncooperation Movement, but he had now added the Punjab atrocities and the Independence Movement of India as subsidiary causes. Here, in the Malabar area, the Khilafat Movement had roused religious furor in the Moplahs. The Government was trying to be vigilant in suppressing skirmishes that threatened to spring here and there.

The Cellular Jail had been closed down as a penal colony, on the recommendation of the Jail Committee. Savarkar and Babarao were transfered to separate jails on the Indian mainland in May. The concessions granted to them in Andaman—the special diet for health reasons, the freedom from hard labor, only writing jobs, full civil clothes, paper and pencil, mixing with other convicts—*all* were taken away. It was as if they were starting their prison sentence from day one. How were they bearing up? How did the spirit cope, all over again, with the same horrors? Babarao was at death's door, Savarkar a little better than that. From the time he went to London in 1906, his life had been one unendurable mishap and danger after another. It was a continuous torture of body and soul, year after year. His mind in torment, his nerves shattered—would he pull through? Would Babarao make it?

Keshu was getting restless for news of them. The need to know was unbearable. The wish to move on had now gripped his mind. It was going to be difficult to broach the subject with his mother. But this day was bound to come. He could not be a layabout all his life!

Today the gym was almost empty.

"Courageous of you to come here today, Keshu!" Unni, another member, exclaimed.

"Courageous! Why do you say that?"

"Which world do you live in, Keshu! Have you not heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Well, the Moplahs have started rioting. On the twentieth, the District Magistrate attempted to arrest a few Moplah leaders in Tirurangadi for possession of illegal arms; now the Moplahs have gone berserk in rebellion!"

"Is there any danger here?"

"Keshu, they have been organizing and arming themselves for a while. Mahatmaji's proclamation of freedom in one year has dazzled them into grabbing this freedom, not for India but for themselves—Muslim Raj! They are on a gruesome killing spree. Even the Moplah women and children are committing atrocities! You live in a remote spot. I would have been wary!"

Keshu's heart chilled. "Is that why no one is here? Oh God! I had better rush off home."

Would the Moplahs riot so close to Calicut? God knows what a frenzied group will do! Deathly afraid, he changed as fast as he could and started off toward home. He ran, across the steel bridge and along the road. It was a lonely stretch, with homes of landowners here and there, well hidden by thick vegetation, and a *dharmashala*,[49] the one he was just passing. Nothing was to be seen through the screen of vegetation. But he stopped. *What* was that sound? A moan . . . ? He had heard so many tortured moans in Andaman. There was no mistaking that pain. Oh God, please let it not be a massacre. He needed to go home; needed to make sure his mother was protected. But he could not ignore that cry, that piteous, heartrending cry. There it was again! He found a gap in the vegetation and went through—and came to an abrupt halt.

It was a horrendous scene. A scene of carnage! Of murder and mayhem! There were bloody, hacked bodies everywhere. Bile rose to his mouth. He turned to the side and vomited violently. He had seen so much to date, and yet nothing as horrible as this. Somewhere in this sea of bodies was someone alive and moaning. He must find them.

As he got closer, his eyes fell upon a woman—a pregnant woman: stripped of all her clothes; her stomach ripped wide open; the baby pulled out still attached to the umbilical cord—his neck broken. The mother's face was twisted in agony. *Oh God! Was she alive when . . . ?* Keshu had to throw up

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49 Free lodging place.

again. The poor little baby—so safe in his mother's womb, so gruesomely sacrificed! How could these Moplahs *do* this?

He took another quick look around; there were bleeding bodies, with body parts scattered here and there—a head, an arm, a leg! Most were stripped naked. Keshu had no more to throw up.

"Hello!" His voice was just a croak. He cleared his throat. "Is anyone alive? Can I help you?"

He looked carefully at all the bodies. It was a very difficult task, but it had to be done. Was that a movement? That bloody bundle there . . . . Oh wait! There was the moan again. Surely not from the well! He made his way there as quickly as he could. It was impossible not to step in blood and gore. *This* was Gandhi's nonviolent movement? What was he going to say to this slaughter?

Keshu looked fearfully over the well wall. More bodies . . . ! Chopped, hacked, and bleeding bodies—floating in a heap in the gloomy darkness in the bowel of the well, twenty feet below. There was the tortured moan again, echoing against the well wall. *Oh God!* Someone in there was alive . . . ! He peered carefully. Yes, that man was stirring, raising his head a little. His eyes—silent, entreating, helpless eyes—met Keshu's. *I must get him out; I must,* thought Keshu desperately, *the pulley rope* . . . . He took a quick look. No rope; it was probably thrown back in the well—impossible to rescue the man without it. In despair, he turned to meet those haunting eyes again. His heart bled for the man. He would have to get help; he also had to carry on, had to get home to his mother—and soon.

He called out, "Sir . . . sir—" the man's head lolled forward limply. "Oh no . . . no . . . ! *Sir!* Don't die, *please*—I will get help, I *will*."

A slight movement caught his attention. What was that in the shadows? He peered closely. Unbelievably, balanced precariously on a tightly wedged stout branch was a small boy, clinging desperately to the well wall. There was some blood on his head. Keshu went over to that side. Even leaning over

completely, hand outstretched, he could not reach the boy. Any moment he could fall over or the branch could break off. It was not to be borne. No, somehow he *had* to pull him out. Now.

Keshu picked up a thick, strong sari lying on the ground, stripped from the denuded women, and tied a loop to one end of it. Gently he called out to the boy, "Hello, little one."

The boy looked up, whimpering. Seeing a stranger, he cowered, eyes screwed shut. "Don't hurt me . . . don't!"

Keshu felt a surge of emotion choking his breast. "I have come to get you out, little one—not to hurt you."

The boy opened his eyes and looked doubtfully at Keshu, fear deeply etched on his face. But Keshu's sincerity reached out to him through the fog of pain.

"Save me. Oh please, get me out of here."

"Yes. I am going to do just that. You are a very brave boy. What is your name?"

"I am Mahesan. I am nine years old."

"Mahesan, I am going to send this sari down to you. Put the loop around your chest, under the arms. When it is tight enough I shall pull you up, okay?"

The boy digested the words and then nodded, very slowly. "Yes, I can do that. Will you get my father out too? He is down there. He may be alive . . . someone is."

Keshu swallowed. Oh God, what should he say . . . ? "We need a long rope for that. We will go to my home and bring some."

"We must hurry . . . *please* . . . he moans."

"We will hurry, I promise. Here, get the sari."

With very economical moves Mahesan put the looped end around himself. He tried to look down, but it was impossible without losing his balance. He cried out to his father, "Acha . . . Acha"—silence—"we will be back, Acha . . . *soon.*"

"Brace yourself away from the wall as I pull, Mahesan," said Keshu, pulling the sari up.

The job was quickly done. Keshu held Mahesan close to his chest, face pressed in his shirt. The horrific scene was

not for the eyes of children. He still had to check that poor bloodied figure. Was she alive? Taking a deep breath, he made his way there carefully. As he neared, the figure moved a little. A pathetic arm tried to stretch out. It was a woman, lying half on her side. She was naked like the others but had pulled a sari over herself for cover.

"Mahesan," said Keshu, "I am going to move you on my back. Keep your eyes closed!"

Mahesan wrapped his arms and legs around Keshu. Keshu bent down to the woman. He caught the feeble hand. Blood, sticky blood, oozed over his palm. The woman made a great effort to turn her head toward Keshu. All Keshu saw were her eyes—agonized and imploring. He stroked a hand over her hair, hoping to convey some comfort. Where was she hurt? He lifted the edge of the sari covering her, very gently—and recoiled. Her stomach, too, was slit open and her insides spilling out. *Oh God!* What *could* he do to save her? Her fingers convulsed in his—once, twice—and slipped out of his grasp to the ground. She was dead.

An involuntary sob choked out of Keshu. Mahesan jerked in fright. "Sir, sir, what . . . ?" He opened his eyes. The full horror of the scene was too much for him to bear. He began sobbing inconsolably.

Quickly, Keshu rubbed his hands on a non-bloody patch and swiped them down his clothes. He had to get out of here—and fast. His mother—he had to get to her.

He took off for the road. There, he paused. Mahesan's crying was now reduced to big, gulping sobs.

"Mahesan, I think we should find a safe spot for you here. There is danger up ahead."

"No! No!" he said, shaking his head wildly. "*Please*, no . . . take me . . . take me with you . . ."

He was likely to get hysterical; perhaps it would be better to take him along. Keshu eyed the greenery around and spotted a stout branch, fairly straight. He picked it up.

"Mahesan, hang on tight, for we have to make haste."

And they were off.

Are those screams . . . ? he thought, as he neared his house. He raced to the gate and stopped short. *Oh God!* The front door was broken down. Fear oozed through every pore. He could hear some shouts and screams from the coconut grove at the back. *O Ma, Ma . . . ! Where are you? The house . . . I must check the house . . . . Ma, be safe . . . . Oh be safe!* he prayed. He strove for some calm. He had to keep a sharp, clear brain. If there was a slim chance of everything coming out right, it could only be by staying alert.

"Mahesan, crawl deep into that hedge and stay hidden!"

Fortunately, Mahesan seemed to understand the urgency of the moment. As soon as Keshu put him down, he scooted to the very middle of the hedge and curled up into a ball.

Gripping the stout stick firmly with both hands, Keshu ran on toward his house—and up the entrance steps, stealthily.

What was that . . . ? A *scream* . . . ?

Looking beyond the front room, through the wide doorway, a horrific scene smote him between the eyes: a man crouched in an alert stance, a sword on the ready to make a deadly swipe; a human torch—emitting that chilling, inhuman scream—coming out of his mother's room, wavering toward the man.

Was that his *mother*?

"Oh God—no . . . *no*"—SWOO-O-O-SH—the sword sliced through the air—"*no-o-o . . . !*"

Then silence—no more screaming.

Thud!—his mother's head landed on the floor. Another thud—her body fell to the ground.

Only the crackle of fire echoed in the momentary, deafening silence.

* * *

A little earlier, Mohini was reading her Gita in the front hall. Today, her mind was wandering. Keshu was so very

restless lately. He was ready to move on, for sure. But was she ready to let him go? What should she do? The heartbreak of parting didn't bear thinking about. Someone had to keep an eye on him too. There was no saying what he would get up to. He lived quietly here but once back to the other life . . . . How quickly he had got sucked into trouble last time! Through her preoccupation she heard a sound. What was that unusual commotion going on in the back? Who was shouting? Was it Kamala, the servant girl?

"*Bai*, run . . . ! Run . . . !"

Run? How very odd. Well, she had better get up and check. On her way, she glanced out of the front door. Most unbelievably, approaching her gate was a group of men with bloodied clothes and bodies, swords and *lathis*[50] in the hands of most of them! *He Ram!*[51] What was this? For a moment, the men paused as they saw her. Even in her simple widow's garb, and at her age, Mohini was beautiful. Then, giving loud whoops, they charged toward her.

Instinctively, Mohini slammed the door and shot the bolt. She was trembling all over. *What to do? What to do?* If she were to run out the back, they would simply follow and catch up with the servants as well; then they would all go down. She raced to her room, two doors down the passage and quickly bolted the door. Her eyes darted to the veranda door; it was bolted. She dragged the bedside table in front of the room door. There wasn't anything else light enough for her drag.

The raucous, vulgar voices were in the house now, shouting. Mohini, deathly afraid, went to the cabinet upon which was her little worship area. Shri Krishna smiled at her so beckoningly, as always. *Lord Krishna, where are you? Is Draupadi*[52] *the only one you will save? I need you. Help, oh help me!*

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50 Stout long sticks.

51 Oh God.

52 Queen of the five Pandava brothers of the Mahabharata; saved by Shri Krishna from being publicly stripped of her clothes by her brothers-in-law.

For a few moments she bent over the statue in helpless supplication. Was this how her life was going to end—stripped naked? Dishonored by rape? Butchered by these animals? No! None of it bore thinking about. She, a Chitpavan Brahmin! A daughter of the Peshwas! She wouldn't, she *couldn't*, allow her honor to be besmirched.

Mohini turned to Shri Krishna for inspiration. The flame from the lamp, kept burning night and day, danced invitingly. And then she knew what to do! She hurried to her cupboard. From the bottom shelf she quickly pulled out a wrapped hoard of fine silk saris. Though being a widow she could never wear any in public, she had not been able to resist the lure of silk. Occasionally she had dressed up in them in her room just to enjoy the luxurious feel of it. Now they would be put to good use.

Outside, the men debated what to do. Euphoria had brought them so far. But the frenzy of their bloodbath was ebbing a little; tiredness was seeping into their limbs.

"Hey," said one, "perhaps we should have fun with the women here; pity to kill them first!"

"Where are the women? There is only that old bird in there!"

"Oh, but so beautiful . . . ! Okay, let us split up. I'll stay here with Malik. The rest of you go find the others; they must be hiding outside," said Mustafa, their leader.

Accordingly, the two stayed behind, Mustafa armed with a sword and Malik with a lathi.

Mohini was working deftly. She wrapped herself in a silk sari. From the cabinet she withdrew the canister of oil that she kept handy to keep the lamp going. She doused herself with oil. Then with a little prayer, she picked up the lamp and held the flame to her body.

Crash! The door burst open, sending the bedside table flying. Eagerly the men entered, only to be faced by a human torch—screeching in the most ghastly way—coming at them. Malik—just a young boy, really—screamed and took off in

fright. Mustafa backed into the passage and stood his ground. He had been looking forward to easing his sexual frustration. *The bloody, bloody bitch! How dare she foil our plans! Why is she screeching—coming at me like that . . . ! Surely—not trying to set me on fire . . . ? I'll show her!*

As soon as she was close enough, he swung the sword with both hands and chopped her head off—*was that a shout?* A sound had impinged upon his consciousness, even as he jumped back, out of the way of the crashing burning body and spurting blood. *Oh the silence . . . what a relief . . . no more of that ghastly racket!*

A bloodcurdling howl from Keshu had him snap his head around in haste.

Keshu in a rage was a fearsome sight. Mustafa—without a second's hesitation—charged full tilt toward Keshu, sword raised with murderous intent. At the very last minute, Keshu side-stepped and hit him *hard* with the branch—knocking him flat to the ground. The sword, flying out of Mustafa's grip, landed on the other side of the divan.

In a trice, Keshu jumped on top of Mustafa, locking him in the crook of his right arm from behind. Heftily built, Mustafa struggled violently, bellowing with rage. But Keshu, strong and empowered by intense fury, soon had him helpless—pinned to the ground by a knee and torso curving backward, with his neck in a stranglehold. Keshu began pressing his left arm into the back of Mustafa's bull-like neck.

Mustafa clawed at Keshu's arms, desperate to relieve the crushing force at his neck draining the strength out of his body.

Malik ventured back timidly to see what was happening. *Ya Allah . . . ! Mustafa . . . his neck . . . !*

"Kill . . . him . . . uhh . . . uhh . . . !" croaked Mustafa, all but unconscious.

The sword . . . where's the sword . . . ? But the sword was nowhere to be seen. With not a second to lose, Malik dropped his lathi and grabbed a heavy-looking stool instead—then advanced toward Keshu.

With a final burst of energy, Keshu crushed Mustafa's neckbones in—just a split second before the stool crashed on his head. Blood poured over his eyes and face. Disoriented, he tried to fend off a second blow, one that would most likely kill him.

Malik, blood lust in his eyes, raised the stool up again.

A volley of sharp, stringent whistles burst upon the scene. The police! All bravado instantly gone, Malik dropped the stool and ran out the back way to save his skin. Keshu, unable to stand, crawled toward his mother's body, still burning. He collapsed unconscious, arms outstretched, at the doorway to the passage.

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Keshu groaned. His head *hurt*! He opened his eyes just a little. Where was he? *Ma . . . Ma . . . .* In a panic, he struggled to sit up. A cool palm gently soothed his brow. For a moment, he wallowed in the comfort it gave. A memory—a burning body, the swishing of the deadly sword, the decapitated head—jerked him upright. His head! Oh God, what was the matter with it? Was that a bandage? His hand groped convulsively at his head. There was that gentle hand again, now lowering him back to the pillow. Keshu focused on that benign presence. She was a kindly looking lady dressed in a white sari with a little cap pinned to her hair. A nurse!

"Where am I?" asked Keshu. The fog in his mind was clearing. As an afterthought he added, "Who am I?" *Pulakeshiraj? Keshav? Who?*

"You do not remember your name? You are Keshav Wadkar." Her voice was soft, so melodious.

"I remember." There was a pause. "Why am I here?"

"This is a small private hospital. Your uncle shifted you here from the government hospital. You have a severe concussion."

Keshu struggled up again. "I need to get out of here. There are things I have to do! My mother . . ."

"Shh . . . don't agitate yourself! It is not good for you. I am sorry, but there is nothing more you can do for your mother." She made the sign of the cross. "May God rest her soul."

"I must . . . . I must! The funeral . . ."

"Mr. Wadkar, the funeral is taken care of. Your uncle—"

"What?" interrupted Keshu. "How can that be? Even *that* little thing I couldn't do for her?" He choked on a sob.

"You have been unconscious for almost two weeks!"—Keshu stared in shock—"the funeral could not wait. Your uncle has been very worried about you."

Limply, Keshu fell back on the pillows. It was all too much for him. "Please, I wish to be alone now."

The days dragged by in the hospital. The staff kept a careful watch on him. He was not alone in his room. Calicut was the refuge for the riot victims; the only really safe place from the Moplahs. Hospitals big and small were filled to capacity and beyond. The Moplahs were on the rampage. At times they were even gathered in strength of two hundred. Not only did they shatter the government working system, uproot railway lines, pull down telegraph poles, and burn hospitals and government buildings, but they also indiscriminately slaughtered or converted thousands of Hindus, appropriated their property, and raped the women. Their banner openly carried an inscription saying:

Khilafat. Allah is Great.
Old and weak, young and strong,
Those who walk, who are rich, poor,
Armed and unarmed, hale and hearty, halt[53] and infirm,
Let everyone, in godlike guise set forthwith to battle.

Ali Masliyar, one of their leaders, was crowned king. Ernad and Walluvanad were even declared as independent Khilafat kingdoms. Muslim Raj was now established! Apparently, it was

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53 Those having difficulty in walking.

considered lucky—lucky . . . !—that the attack in his area was just a small offshoot of the main movement. Keshu had tried to get news of the little boy, Mahesan. He had been found by the police; some relatives had claimed him. Perhaps it was just as well not to see him again. What good could it do the boy to revive horrendous memories?

Keshu's recovery was slow. He was lackluster; he had no will to push for better health. The nurse and the ayah quite doted on him. Anxiously, they watched over him, lest he commit suicide, so apprehensive were they about his apathy. His uncle visited him often. Keshu had no particular wish to see him or indeed anyone else. The sight of his uncle only brought his mother to mind; thoughts of his mother were too painful to be borne. The first visit was awkward and set the tone for all others that followed.

"Hello, Keshu," said Dutta, infusing a certain warmth in his tones.

"Hello, Duttakaka." Keshu was remote.

"This is a very good hospital. They will take good care of you. Soon, soon you will be out of here."

"Yes."

"I am very, very sorry about what happened to your mother—"

"*Stop!* I have no wish to hear or talk about that!"

Dutta paused a little. Keshu looked very alarming. He had never known what to make of this odd boy, had never really tried to know him. Now it was too late.

"You are welcome to stay with us, in my home, as long as you need. We are your family."

"No!"—*where was this family when I was growing up . . . ? When my mother was outcast and alone . . . ?*—"no . . . I have to leave Calicut! It will be unbearable here!"

Dutta looked as if he would like to argue. But Keshu looked so wan and drained that he forbore. A few days later, Dutta tried to change his mind. But Keshu was adamant.

"Duttakaka, I shall go to Poona and pick up my life there."

"Keshu," Dutta expostulated, "you have your father's share in the business, your home—everything here. Your mother loved it here—"

Keshu raised his palm to silence him. "Leave my mother out of it! The home has to be sold. I can *never* go back there. With my share of the business, do what you will. I *have* to get out of here, for good! Can't you understand that?"

"Yes, yes perhaps I can," replied Dutta sadly. "I will take care of the sale of the house for you when things are settled here. Also, I will post some money to you regularly at Madhavrao's address—somehow, I'll manage it. It will be handy, that is the very least I can do for you."

"Thank you."

"What about all your mother's belongings?"

Keshu's eyes burned with inner fire. "Get rid of them! *Don't* talk to me of it!"

"Okay, okay," said Dutta pacifically, "but you must keep her box of jewelry. She had kept it all for your wife."

Keshu was very aggravated. Jewelry! What cared he for such things! But Dutta was insistent. "Keshu, that would have made your mother *very* happy. You must take it, for her sake."

The fire died. Keshu closed his eyes, tortured by the ever-recurring images. "Whatever you say, Duttakaka, whatever you say! Now leave me *alone*!"

Chapter Nine

1922, Poona

By January, the Government had put an end to the Moplah Rebellion. Gandhi[54] had praised the Moplahs for their "brave" deed. He declared them a "God-fearing" people, showering congratulations upon them for fighting in a manner they considered befitting to their religion. Congratulation and praise for such heinous, *barbaric* acts, perpetrated upon innocent victims . . . !

As news of the reality percolated throughout the country, Indians, particularly the Hindus, were in shock. Where was the Hindu-Muslim unity much-touted by Gandhi and the Khilafatist? What now? Gandhi and the Congress sought to dissociate themselves from the Moplah Rebellion. They declared, contrary to evidence, that it had no roots in the Khilafat Movement. They also tried to whitewash the reality, to

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54 **Gandhi-quote from his magazine, *Young India*, September 8, 1921:** "The Moplahs are among the bravest in the land. They are god-fearing. Their bravery must be transformed into purest gold."

Another Gandhi-quote: "Forcible conversions are horrible things but Moplah bravery must commend admiration." *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet,* Dhananjay Keer; pg 401.

"Gandhi did not feel much for the rapes and murders and forcible conversions. He had declared that he would sacrifice a million men for his principles! Three months earlier he had said: 'I think that only god-fearing people can become true noncooperators.' And now he hailed the murderous Moplahs as god-fearing men!" *ibid;* page 403.

minimize the horror that was committed. The Moplahs were being heralded as martyrs to the freedom cause . . . ! It was an ignoble attitude for a national leader and the leading national party to take.

For Keshu it was *unendurable*. He was living with Madhavrao now. He moved around like a lost soul; the horrific events played over and over in his raging mind. Strenuous exercise, long walks, and long silences; those were his constant companions, his only solace. His family was very worried. What could one say to him? How does one console a young man who survives the Andaman hellhole only to witness mayhem and his mother's horrific death? How to bring some interest back in his life? They were quite at a loss. Still, something had to be done.

"Keshubal," said Radhabai, with grim determination, "what are your plans for today?"

"Nothing in particular, Radhabai." Keshu looked at her blankly. "Do you need me?"

"Yes, Keshu, I do. Remember Aptemaushi[55] . . . ?"

Keshu wrinkled his brow. "Yes. Yes, I do; one of the widows visiting you. They were kind enough to keep my identity secret."

Radhabai smiled in satisfaction. "*Arre,* I have made her favorite dessert. Can you please take it to her? She will be so happy to see you as well."

"Very well, Radhabai. I shall—this afternoon."

Professor Dhondo Karve, a social worker, had established Mahilashram, a home for widows and orphan girls, on the outskirts of Poona in Hingne, in 1896. Though many shunned his cause, Madhavrao and Radhabai actively supported him. Radhabai regularly invited some of the widows to her home, to give them a break. In 1912, when Keshu lived there, Venubai Apte was one of four widows visiting her. They all, especially Aptemaushi, had taken to the young boy.

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55 Maushi: maternal aunt, also used as a courtesy.

Keshu decided to cycle the four-five miles to the Mahilashram. It was quite a remote road with a lot of greenery and hills. There was a nip in the air. A bird trilled here and there. Keshu wallowed in its peace. Abruptly, a woman's cry of distress pierced the air. Keshu pedaled fast around the bend. A widow, for she was dressed in an *alvan*,[56] was being heckled by two men. Memories of his mother's last moments flashed before his eyes. An intense rage suffused him. He had been helpless to aid his mother but not so today! Today he would take care of these hooligans.

He hopped quickly off the bicycle, letting it fall to the ground, and strode purposefully toward the men. One had dared to grab the lady's wrist and was twisting it. They seemed to be making some lewd comment and leering lasciviously at her. Before they had time to realize what was about, Keshu had swung a vicious blow to the jaw of one, felling him, and grabbed the other by his collar, almost lifting him off the ground.

"Oy! What are you . . . ugh . . . ugh . . . ?" The man's voice petered off to a croak as Keshu tightened his hold.

Putting his face close to the man's, Keshu hissed, "If you dare to harass *any* woman *ever* again, I will break every bone in your body. Got it?"

Speaking being impossible through that stranglehold, the man blinked rapidly hoping to convey his understanding. Keshu flung him down.

The other man struggled to get up. Having missed the hissed words, he tried to placate Keshu, "Bhau,[57] if you want a share of that lovely piece, I am sure there is enough to go around. Why fight?"

His friend nudged him frantically with his toe. But too late! Keshu, about to turn away, advanced menacingly instead. The conciliatory smile on the goon's face was wiped out in a second. Propelled to his feet by a belated instinct of self-preservation

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56 Plain maroon sari, garb of a widow.

57 Brother.

he—and his friend too—took off without a backward glance. Keshu took a few deep breaths—to still the rage coursing through his blood—and went to retrieve his cycle.

The lady stood, eyes cast down, sari *pallu*[58] wrapped closely over her head, half covering her face. Keshu approached her, wheeling the cycle.

"I am Pulakeshiraj Soman. They are gone. I doubt they will bother you again."

"Thank you for coming to my aid. I shall be on my way now."

"But it is not safe!"

She looked up. He got a glimpse of a fierce fire shining out of her eyes. Then she looked away.

"I have no choice. I work in the Shaniwar Peth. On the way back I have a ride only till Kothrud. It is not a very long walk home from there."

"Long enough! Hmm, that does pose a problem."

"Problem! No such thing," she exclaimed, much to Keshu's surprise. "This is the first time such a thing has happened! From now on I shall carry a thick stick and keep a sharp lookout. It is for a few days, anyway. When our Founder comes back from his travels, I shall have company."

"We'll see," said Keshu, clapping a mental hand to his forehead. What good was a stick going to do in such circumstances? Should he set her straight on a few facts of life? Better not. The lady was foolhardy, perhaps, but undoubtedly plucky!

"Right now I shall escort you home. Are you going to the Mahilashram?"

She shot him a quick, annoyed glance, not liking his insistence. "Yes."

"As it so happens, I am going there as well—to see Venubai Apte. Do you know her?"

"Yes."

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58 Loose end of the sari.

Undaunted, so far, by the monosyllables, he persevered, "Would you like to pillion ride on this?"—he pointed to his cycle—"it will be quite safe."

"Certainly *not*! I shall walk."

She set off at a brisk pace, the swishing of her alvan expressing her displeasure. Keshu matched her steps and wheeled his cycle. A silence, quite an awkward one, descended. He stole a few sideways glances. He had had no problem conversing with the British ladies; so why the hesitancy here? Perhaps it was the unapproachable profile, what was visible of it, anyway. She carried herself statuesquely, very like an annoyed queen at the moment. If he had expected gratitude, a certain warmth, for rescuing her from what was certainly a very ugly situation, he was doomed to disappointment. She had not unbent enough to even give her name to him. Well, that was soon remedied.

"Er . . . excuse me." Keshu cleared his throat. "You did not tell me your name."

"I know," she replied, not looking at him.

Is that all she is going to say? thought Keshu incredulously. He resolved not to utter *one* more word.

"I am Lakshmi Athavale."

The goddess had relented. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth! Lakshmibai, the Queen of Jhansi! Well, *this* Lakshmi was certainly well named. She had attitude enough to be goddess and queen all rolled in one!

At the Mahilashram, Lakshmi quickly disappeared into her hostel wing. Keshu spent some time there with Aptemaushi. He was very glad he had come here. All day and the next he was unable to get Lakshmi out of his mind. He brooded over her attitude. Why the hostility? Surely his protection warranted *some* consideration—a little friendliness? He was only helping her. He shuddered with horror, his imagination conjuring up images better left alone. Going about alone on a deserted road like that . . . ! She looked old enough to know better, was even older than him perhaps. Well, she had given him short shrift, but the truth was that it was not safe.

The same time next afternoon he found himself on the road to the Mahilashram in time to bump into Lakshmi. He intended to be her escort home every day. They argued over it briefly. There was not much she could do to prevent him from being there. But her pigheadedness was too much!

"Do you really," cried Keshu, exasperated, "expect me to believe that you are not glad of my presence by your side? Would you rather bump into goons by yourself?"

Lakshmi, about to launch into more words, shut her mouth with a snap. There was no getting away from the truth. Yesterday's experience had been very unsettling. And *yet* what was to be done? No way would she give up working, her one chance of independence. In this man's world, with all the unjust rules that society imposed on widows too, she had prevailed—so far. Galling as it was, she was glad, really, that this man planned to be there every day. It *was* rather sweet of him. Still, that was no reason for him to be shouting at her!

"No, I would not," Lakshmi admitted shortly and set off walking.

And so the pattern was set. Keshu came every day, on his horse, Krishnaa, or his cycle. Lakshmi did unbend enough to relax the regal rigidity. Her head remained firmly covered by her pallu, but he could see her face. She was aloof; they did not speak much. But Keshu was content, for now, with just this much. It seemed rather important to be doing this. She was not beautiful, in the strict sense of the word, but there was much strength of character in her face. She was very attractive—oval face, a regal nose, dusky skin, and her eyes . . . ! So very eloquent!

One day, Keshu, getting quite bold, plucked a rose from Radhabai's precious garden, avoiding her discerning eye. *No one* was allowed to touch her roses.

"For you," he said, presenting the rose to Lakshmi.

There was a long pause. Was that a film of tears in her eyes?

"I am sorry, but I have no use for it," said Lakshmi continuing to walk.

"Of course you do. Women are always putting flowers in their hair. So what if you are a widow?" Silence. "Perhaps you do not like *me* giving it to you?"

Lakshmi came to an abrupt halt. "It is not that. Look—"

She uncovered her head. Her hair was cut very short, not a shaven head,[59] but quite close.

Keshu was shocked. "But why? Surely at the Mahilashram you do *not* have to follow those rules!"

"I am afraid one day I was very angry and in a fit of rage and frustration shaved my head. It was a pathetic gesture. There is no escaping one's fate."

Keshu's heart squeezed painfully. How difficult was the life of widows. He had seen his mother's suffering. Now here was Lakshmi going through the same tribulations. Life was so unfair.

"Well," he said, trimming all the thorns from the rose, "you cannot put it in your hair, but certainly it can be fixed behind your ear!" He tucked it there.

"Nice!" he said approvingly.

There was pleasure but also doubt in her face. "Oh, I couldn't wear it like that." She made a move to take it off.

Keshu caught hold of her wrist. "No, leave it."

They stood thus, gazes locked—Lakshmi, looking quite beautiful with the rose caressing her cheek, sari fluttering freely in the breeze; and Keshu clutching her wrist. A new awareness sprang up between them. Keshu was drowning in her eyes, those hypnotic eyes. Of its own volition his other hand went to her shoulder, and with gentle pressure he urged her toward him. She came. His hand moved to stroke her hair. So soft it was, just long enough to curl around his finger. So soft . . . so very soft . . .

With a shuddering breath Lakshmi came to her senses. Jerking free of Keshu's hold, she moved blindly forward. In her

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59 Widows were required to shave their heads traditionally.

haste, she stumbled on a protruding stone. Her foot, coming out of her slipper, landed heavily on a thorn.

"*Ooh . . . aaiga!*" she cried, tottering.

Keshu grabbed her arm to steady her. She lifted her foot, tears of pain swimming in her eyes. The nub of an ugly-looking thorn stuck out from her heel. Keshu took a quick sweeping look around.

"I will carry you to that rock there. We need to get this one out and very carefully."

"You will *not* carry me!"

Keshu tutted exasperatedly, but Lakshmi was hobbling to the rock already, slipper in hand. Keshu followed. Crouching beside her on the rock he held out his palm. A moment's pause—then she put her foot in it. The thorn appeared to be long and all the way in, almost. He had to be careful not to leave the tip behind.

"This will hurt, but I will do my best."

She nodded, bracing herself for more pain. Keshu squeezed and pinched the flesh around the thorn, ignoring her strangled gasp. Gripping the protruding tip firmly, he steadily pulled out the thorn in one fluid motion.

"Do you want to keep it as a souvenir?"

She shook her head, two tears falling from her eyes. She made an angry swipe at them with her pallu. Keshu bound her foot with his handkerchief and stood up.

"Well, I shall either have to carry you the rest of the way or you ride on Krishnaa."

An obstinate look crossed her face. Enough was enough!

"Which one? Make a choice or I make it for you."

"I shall ride on the horse," she said, lifting her chin defiantly.

Keshu whistled to Krishnaa to come closer. Without much ado he lifted Lakshmi onto the horse. It was rather alarming for Lakshmi to be perched at that height. She clutched fearfully at the mane. Krishnaa whinnied and pranced a little.

"Eeee . . .," cried Lakshmi, slipping a little. "I am going to fall!"

"Don't be afraid. I won't let you fall," said Keshu, hitching her back up.

Lakshmi was unconvinced. She said nothing but clutched harder at the horse and gazed blankly straight ahead. Krishnaa, not being used to nervous riders, was getting testy. There was a very simple solution. Quickly, Keshu swung himself up behind Lakshmi.

"Shh!" he said, at her shocked look. "No arguments. This is the most practical way. Before you know it you will be home. Lean against me; I'll hold you."

He put one arm around her and held the reins with the other. Lakshmi sat erect and unbending. With the click of Keshu's tongue and a kick from his heels, Krishnaa took off at a powerful gallop. Frightened, Lakshmi, per force, set aside all modesty and clung to Keshu for dear life. Keshu gave an exultant but silent laugh. His Krishnaa was a spirited mare. She was named after Shivaji's horse, after all. Lakshmi's queenly act was quite in abeyance now. How much more approachable she was with her head tucked under his chin, eyes tightly shut praying for the ordeal to be quickly over. He tightened his hold and enjoyed the moments. He could get very much used to this.

"Where do you want me to set you down?" asked Keshu as they neared the Mahilashram.

Lakshmi opened her eyes. "Oh, are we there already? Please, I shall get down outside, before we get to the gates."

"It is quite a walk to the hostel."

"Yes, but it would not look right to turn up like this."

As Keshu lifted her to the ground, she said, "Thank you for your help. You have been very kind."

Keshu walked with her till the gates and watched, as she hobbled away. At the door of her hostel she turned to see if he was there; he waved. Quickly, she went in.

The next day, Keshu waited for Lakshmi but in vain. He had worried about her all day. Had the thorn come out intact?

Was her foot infected? Could she walk? So many questions! Another day went by; still no Lakshmi. Rather than worry any more, Keshu rode on to the Mahilashram. At the hostel, he asked to meet Aptemaushi. She was soon before him. They stepped out into the grounds and sat on the stone seat that encircled a shady mango tree. Aptemaushi seemed calm and friendly as always. Were there some shadows in her eyes? Without too many preliminaries, Keshu went straight to the heart of the matter.

"Aptemaushi, how is Lakshmi?"

"Lakshmi?" said Aptemaushi, raising her eyebrows.

Keshu blushed. "Lakshmibai, I mean."

"She is in some trouble, Keshu."

"Trouble! Do you mean with her foot?"

"No, Keshu. Someone spied the two of you on horseback the other day. They suspect Lakshmi of an affair with you. She is grounded. No going out, no going to work, nothing until further notice."

"But this is terrible!" exclaimed Keshu, jumping to his feet. "We did absolutely no wrong. Why must they punish her like this? This is intolerable!" He paced back and forth for a bit, thinking deeply. "Aptemaushi, can you arrange for me to meet her?"

"But why, Keshu? Leave her alone. Isn't her life difficult enough without you making more trouble for her?"

Keshu took Aptemaushi's hand in his own. "Please, Aptemaushi, I must see her," he urged, his eyes gazing intently into hers.

She sighed. "There was always something about you that I could not resist, Keshu! Okay, I will do it."

"*Thank you,* Aptemaushi. I'll go out of the gate and come back from the outside near that banyan tree all the way down from the hostel. Meet me in fifteen minutes."

He circled the grounds and got off Krishnaa as he came to the meeting spot. The boundary fence, not being worthy of the name, was easy to crawl through. The banyan was right

there. Peeping around the banyan, he could see Aptemaushi and Lakshmi crossing the grounds. Lakshmi was limping. Keshu's heart raced. Aptemaushi waved Lakshmi forward with her hand and went discreetly away. Lakshmi came to a halt before Keshu. He looked at her uncompromising profile for a few seconds.

"How are you, Lakshmi?" he asked.

Pulling her pallu tighter around her head, she replied, "Quite well, thank you." She bit her lip and turned away. "I will not need your escort getting back from work anymore. For now, I shall not be working. They need me here—"

"Lakshmi!" interrupted Keshu. He caught hold of her hands. "Look at me, Lakshmi!"

She did so, completely taken by surprise. He let his eyes scan her face. She was putting up a brave front, but anger, frustration, and sadness were all there in her eyes. Uncomfortable, she tried to shake loose. He tightened his hold.

"Lakshmi, marry me!"

She froze in her struggles, staring at him in shock. Next second, she yanked her hands out of his grip.

"How dare you!"—her eyes were spitting fire—"how *dare* you throw such words at me! Do you take me for a fool? Men do not marry widows, especially ones like me. You are presuming too much. I *never* asked for your concern or escort. I do *not* want or need your patronage! You have made enough trouble in my life; now get out of it!" She paused for breath.

She was magnificent in her anger—chest heaving, eyes sparkling with emotions. But Keshu had no time to admire. "Lakshmi," he said quietly, "I am asking you to *marry* me."

"Stop it! Men like you do *not* marry women like me. You are younger than me by five years as well; Aptemaushi told me so. It is a cruel joke . . . !"

"It's not a *joke*! I mean what I say. That you are older than me makes no difference. I want to marry you. Nothing, except your refusal, can prevent it from happening."

Lakshmi was doubtful. "Are you saying . . . ? You . . . you were meeting me with the intention of marriage?"

"No, Lakshmi," said Keshu, honestly. "*Something* pulled me there. I admired you, was fascinated actually, and wanted to get to know you better. I didn't think ahead."

"Well, there you are then—"

"But now, in the instant that the chance to see you was gone I realized that I want you in my life—for always."

"My life is my own, such as it is. I can take care of myself. I do not need your—*anyone's*—pity."

"It is not pity that prompts me, Lakshmi. If that was all it was, there is a wide selection of brides right there," said Keshu, pointing to the hostel wings. He caught her hands and pulled her closer. "I need *you*. Believe it."

Lakshmi looked at him for a long time and then dropped her eyes. "It is too sudden. I didn't imagine . . . I can't . . ."

A terrible thought gripped Keshu. "You do not like me? At all?"

Lakshmi blushed. "Oh no, it is not that! I *do* like you. How can anyone not like you? Oh, oh, oh . . . what am I saying . . . !" She whisked her hands out of his grip and buried her face in them.

Keshu was light-headed with relief. She did like him—half the battle was won! He was rushing her. She needed some time to think it over.

"I *had* to speak now, though you have had no chance to get to know me well."

Silence. Keshu tried again: "Would you prefer me to come back? Tomorrow?"

She nodded, still hiding behind her palms.

"All right then, I will be here at the same time. Good-bye for now."

Lakshmi dropped her hands, turning to leave. Quickly, Keshu caught her hands, forestalling her; he raised them to his lips. "Don't forget—I need you. Say yes tomorrow."

Keshu was in an agony of suspense until the following day. Thoughts whirred around in his head. What if she said no?

What was he to do? Perhaps she thought he was too young for her? What did he know of women, after all? Like a callow youth he had blurted out a proposal. Why had he not thought of making a formal offer, through his aunt? Oh God! She did not know anything of his past. He should have told her. Would it turn her off? Round and round the thoughts went. The memory of her in his arms, as they rode together, her scent enticing his nostrils, brought fire to his loins. He was so very restless.

His family didn't know what to make of it. Radhabai had given him several odd looks, hovering on the verge of asking questions but had mercifully refrained.

Now he was back here, waiting. And waiting. She was late! Every so often he peeped around the banyan toward the hostel door. No sign of movement. Keshu was reduced to wringing his hands. He had come prepared with options if she refused. That she would not turn up was not something he had considered! Finally, fifteen minutes later, he saw two figures slip out of the hostel. She was coming! Aptemaushi melted away as before. Lakshmi looked grave and serious—hardly the happy bride to be. Keshu's heart, already knocked about with worry, sank to his feet.

Without preamble, she began, "I know all about you. I asked Aptemaushi."

Keshu went white like a sheet. That was the problem then—she was going to refuse! He turned away, his hands curled into fists. "Everything?"

"Yes."

"So my safety is in your hands, then." He was hardly aware what he spoke.

There was a rustle of cotton. A cool hand was on his fist. "Your safety is my safety. I will marry you."

Keshu stared, her softly spoken words coming out of the blue. Gently, she led him to the stone bench around the tree.

"I didn't intend to say that yet. I had something to ask you first," said Lakshmi.

"Yes?"

"Tell me again, why do you want to marry me?"

After the wild mental seesaw, Keshu was still knocked off balance, unable to believe his good fortune. He replied rather mechanically, "I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Grow old together. I need you, perhaps to hold my pieces together."

Tears rolled down Lakshmi's cheeks.

"Lakshmi!" Keshu was horrified. The ice was broken. He put his arms around her. "What did I say to upset you so?"

"You do not want me to be the mother of your children?"

He took her chin and lifted her face toward him. "Is that what I should have said? I did not think of it, I am afraid. I was thinking only of me. But if that is what you—"

"No! I should have told you yesterday. I think I am barren. I cannot give you any children, perhaps. I cannot marry you if *that* is what you want."

Keshu held her close. "Lakshmi, I want to marry *you*. Children are God's gift. If we don't have them, so be it."

"*Every* man wants sons!"

"I am not 'every' man, Lakshmi. You know now what my life has been the last so many years. Who can say what trials are yet to come? I am not promising you a bed of roses. I have great hopes of Tatyarao's—Savarkar's—early release. My plan is to devote my life in his service, for his cause. Wherever it leads, I shall go. Maybe, it is a blessing *not* to bring children into the world! Perhaps, tomorrow—or the next year—brings my death—"

Lakshmi put her hand to his lips. "Don't say it!"

Keshu kissed her fingers. "It has to be faced, Lakshmi. There is no escaping reality. You will have to come into this marriage with your eyes open."

"I am, Keshu, I am! *Oh!* I said your name!"[60]

Keshu laughed. "Get used to it, Lakshmi. I shall soon be your husband."

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60 Hindu women did not address or refer to their husband by name.

Scandalized, Lakshmi pulled back, both palms at her cheeks, eyes open wide. "I *cannot*! It is just not done."

Keshu laughed again. "If you go by that, our marriage is not a 'done' thing either. As I said, I am not every man. I like my name on your lips. Right here," he said and gave her a quick kiss. Lakshmi blushed and hid her face in his shoulder.

"Aptemaushi has been saying Keshu this, Keshu that . . . so I got used to thinking of you like that."

"Good for Aptemaushi! I owe her so much. When in public you can call me what you like. But in private Keshu it is. I won't answer otherwise."

"Very dictatorial!" said Lakshmi, bristling a little and looking up.

"Sheath your sword, my Queen of Jhansi!" whispered Keshu close to her forehead.

"Queen of Jhansi!" exclaimed Lakshmi, greatly intrigued. "Why do you call me that?"

"Well, that's how I have been thinking of you for many days now," said Keshu mischievously. "There you were with your queenly act treating me like a lowly slave."

"I did *not*! How very . . ."

"Shh, my Queen!"

Her sparkling eyes trained on him made Keshu lose the thread of the conversation entirely. He cupped her face in his palms and put his lips to hers. For a moment, she hesitated and then surrendered. She put her arms around his neck and pressed closer, molding her body to his. Her, warm, moist mouth, her gentle roving tongue, her hands playing with his hair all went to his head—Keshu was lost in a haze of passion. Her lips wandered to trail some kisses and nips on his chin. Keshu could hardly bear to let go. He brought her lips back to his. Good God, one kiss and he was undone! She really was going to enslave him. He enjoyed running his hands over her. How soft she was, a cozy armful. Moments—eons—went by.

"Lakshmi," he murmured.

Lakshmi, blushing, tried to hide her face in his shoulder again.

"Good God, Lakshmi! You can't hide from me, not after *that*!"

He held her face gently with his palms and stroked his thumb tenderly over her lower lip, looking deep into her eyes. Lakshmi took a shuddering breath. Her eyes shut, two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh Lakshmi!" said Keshu, letting go her face and holding her close. "What is it? Why are you crying?"

"I am so happy, Keshu. I . . . I . . . never . . ."

Keshu planted a kiss on her ear.

"Oh Keshu! Is this all a dream?"

"No, Lakshmi. Feel that," he said, nipping her cheek. He pulled out his handkerchief. "I had better make sure I have a good supply of these! I seem to need them so much"—he mopped her face; then kissed her eyes—"Lakshmi, we had better get married soon, very soon. I don't think I can get enough of this." His lips followed the curve of her cheek, intent on making his way to her lips.

"Oh, we can't do that!" wailed Lakshmi.

Keshu stopped mid-track. "Not do it? Why ever not?"

"I mean we cannot get married soon," she said, blushing furiously. "My hair! It has to grow first."

"Lakshmi . . . !" exclaimed Keshu. "*That* could take months! Cover your head; put false hair, something—anything. I cannot wait for it grow, of that I am positive."

"But—"

"No buts." He began kissing her once more.

"Eeee . . ." she said, jerking back.

Keshu pulled her to him again.

"No, no"—she was swatting his hands off—"I hear someone coming . . . Aptemaushi."

Keshu reluctantly let her go. He could hardly take his eyes off her. Lakshmi swiftly rearranged her sari. She had just enough time to pull the pallu demurely over her head when Aptemaushi made a noisy entrance.

"Well, time is up, both of you."
Seeing Keshu in a haze, she exclaimed, "Keshu! *Arre* Keshu!"
"Oh, er . . . hello, Aptemaushi," said Keshu, snapping out of it.
"What, Keshu? Are you going to eat her with your eyes?"
Keshu blushed to the tips of his ears. "Er . . . I . . . er . . ."

"Time enough for all that when you marry!" she admonished, slapping his hand.

Lakshmi giggled, and Keshu knew not where to look.

"Well," said Aptemaushi, relenting a little, "let us get you married quickly, then. So what is the next step?"

"Er . . . I will get Radhabai to come here tomorrow and bring both of you home for a few days. Then we shall make all the arrangements," said Keshu, recovering his composure somewhat, but ears still shining red like a beacon.

Lakshmi turned apprehensively to him. "Oh, but how can you be sure she will help us? Have you spoken to her already? She may not like me!"

Keshu couldn't bear to see the anxiety in her eyes. Aptemaushi or no Aptemaushi, he caught Lakshmi's hands and took them to his lips.

"It will all be fine, Lakshmi. Don't worry. I assure you Radhabai will have no objections. But if she does, it will make no difference. I will marry you just the same."

Aptemaushi clapped a hand to her forehead. "*He Ram!* There will be no trouble from Radhabai. I have known her a long time." She knocked Keshu's hands away from Lakshmi's, giving him a sharp look. "The only danger for now is from this one here. Let's go, Lakshmi. It is getting late."

As they turned to go, he could hear her saying, "Watch out, Lakshmi, that one's going to be a handful . . ."

Keshu rushed home. He could hardly take care of Krishnaa and clean up before heading for the kitchen.

"Radhabai . . . Radhabai!"

Radhabai, sitting on her paat and cooking, looked up in amazement. Was that Keshu? She had never seen him so animated, even as a child. It was wonderful to see.

"Yes, Keshu? What is it?"

"Drop everything, Radhabai. I have something important to tell you," he said, pulling her up to her feet.

"Keshu, Keshu . . .," said Radhabai, laughing. "The dinner . . .!"

"Nothing matters today, Radhabai!" Keshu swung her around. "I am getting married."

"Married!" Radhabai squeaked, clutching Keshu's arm for support, dizzy after the unexpected twirl. Things were moving fast!

Madhavrao, having heard the excitement, walked in. "What is it?"

"*Aho*,[61] Keshu says he is getting married!"

Both looked expectantly at Keshu. A little self-conscious, Keshu said, "I met her by chance. Her name is Lakshmi Athavale."

"Oh, isn't that the name of the widow who lives in Aptemaushi's wing? A very reserved sort of woman . . . ?"

"Yes, Radhabai, that's her! She has agreed to marry me."

"A widow!" Radhabai exclaimed, trying to get used to the idea.

But Madhavrao came to Keshu and hugged him warmly. "Keshubal, I am so glad for you. I don't quite know how you reached here"—he gave a questioning look, and Keshu blushed—"but it is the most wonderful news. Don't worry; we shall not hold her widowhood against her. But what of her family? Whom do we have to contact?"

"I don't know yet, Madhavrao. I was hoping that Radhabai will bring Aptemaushi and Lakshmi here tomorrow. Then we can iron out all the details." He paused, then his words tumbled out in a rush. "I want to get married soon."

Madhavrao laughed, clapping his shoulder approvingly. "Way to go, Keshu!"

"Aho, how can we rush? There will be so many things to plan. *He Ram!* I had better make a start already."

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61 Way of addressing husband, in lieu of the name.

"Radhabai," said Keshu, "I want a very quiet wedding. In fact, I wish to get married in the little Vithoba temple in Aundh. With just us and whoever that Lakshmi wants. That's it."

There was a somber silence. At the mention of Aundh, all thoughts went to Damu. After his secret cremation, on Radhabai's brother Govindrao's property in Aundh, his ashes had been secretly cast into the river by that very temple. That is why Keshu wanted to marry there.

"Yes," said Radhabai, mopping her eyes with her pallu. "That is a very special, spiritual place. I will like that too."

Then, to chase away the poignancy at this happy time, she added briskly, "Okay, okay, let me get cracking. Of course I shall bring them here tomorrow, first thing in the morning. I will get their rooms prepared right now." She left to do that.

"*He Ram!*" she cried, returning immediately. "I am so excited—I don't know what I am doing! I forgot about dinner. Now, shoo from my kitchen both of you. I can't say how dinner will taste today. So be warned!"

The next morning, Keshu paced the porch waiting impatiently for the ladies to arrive. They seemed to be taking an inordinate amount of time. What could have gone wrong? *Had* anything gone wrong? He wrung his hands; he slammed his fist into the other palm; he muttered to himself. Vidu, who was accompanying him on the porch, watched these histrionics with amazement. He had never seen his cousin this overwrought. He didn't dare utter a word, however. But if this is what marriage reduced one to, he was better out of it for a good long time!

There was the clatter of the tonga turning into the driveway, and soon the ladies were getting out. Keshu ran straight to Lakshmi and caught her hands in his.

"What happened? Why are you so late?"

Lakshmi frantically signaled him with her eyes, trying to free her hands.

"Keshu!" Radhabai rapped out.

Keshu jumped and dropped Lakshmi's hands. "Yes, *Mami*,[62] er . . . Radhabai, I mean," he said, quite flustered by Radhabai's hawk-like gaze.

"Keshu, everything is okay. Restrain yourself. Let her come into the house, settle in. Don't pounce—"

Her flow of words came to an abrupt stop. Lakshmi's pallu had slipped from her head a little. There sitting proudly behind her ear was Radhabai's own rose. She was *sure* of it, for it was of a most unusual orange-red color.

Radhabai glared accusingly at Keshu. "But that is *my*—"

Keshu pulled both his earlobes penitently, mouth curved in a rueful smile.

"Oh very well then"—she shook her finger warningly at Keshu—"it is all in a good cause after all. I'll let you off this time. Come on, ladies," she said, ushering Lakshmi in.

Keshu and Aptemaushi followed behind.

"I think she will keep her under lock and key, Keshu," laughed Aptemaushi. "At least until the wedding. She doesn't trust you."

"We'll see!"

After lunch, Radhabai had taken firm control. She had whisked Lakshmi off to her room and given her a couple of her own saris. Lakshmi looked very nice dressed in one right now. But for all Keshu got to see of her, she might as well be at the Mahilashram! The ladies were chattering together in the family area. The afternoon was getting on.

"Radhabai," said Keshu, going there determinedly, "I will take Lakshmi for a ride to Hanuman Tekdi."

"A ride!" exclaimed Radhabai, scandalized. "Do you ride a horse, Lakshmi?"

Poor Lakshmi shook her head, much embarrassed.

"I shall take her before me on Krishnaa, Radhabai."

"*He Ram*, Keshu! Take her with you on the horse, indeed! Is that any way to behave? Certainly you shall not!"

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62 Maternal uncle's wife.

"Radhe!" Radhabai's raised voice had brought Madhavrao in their midst. "Leave them alone. Go, Lakshmi, go with him."

Keshu left with her hurriedly, before any more objections could be made.

"Aho, but—" Radhabai expostulated.

"Radhe, the poor boy has spent years locked up in prison. Last year has been an appalling year for him. Let him do what his heart wants." A film of tears shone in his eyes. "I would a hundred times see him behaving imprudently with his wife-to-be than have that lost soul back with us. God has given him his smile back. I will not let you take it from him."

"Well, that is true, I suppose," said Radhabai, still somewhat unconvinced. "He is a deep one, isn't he?"

Outside, Lakshmi was expressing concern over the impropriety of riding together. "Keshu, what will people think if we do this?"

"Lakshmi, people will always have something to say; it is what they do. I do not intend to live my life in fear of their words. I have seen my mother waste her life. You have catered enough to the whims of society. Now we do what we enjoy and think right."

Lakshmi was still hesitant.

"But," continued Keshu, "we can walk until we are out of sight of all the houses, if you so wish."

Lakshmi's smile was radiant. "Oh yes, that will be perfect. You may call me Queen of Jhansi, but I am not her!"

The ride this time was much more enjoyable. Krishnaa made short work of the distance. They were at the temple atop Hanuman Tekdi before they knew it. To be here was a very poignant experience for Keshu. Raw emotions surged up to choke him, always. He led Lakshmi by the hand to the temple. They rang the temple bell and offered their obeisance to the idol. Keshu walked to a little clearing from where the general vista was visible. He gazed into space, running his hand through his hair.

"Lakshmi, here is where I took the Abhinav Bharat oath. I can *feel* Damu's presence here. Tatyarao seems so very close here too—he used to have his Abhinav Bharat meetings here, you know. That's why I spend hours and hours here . . . ." There was a long pause. "I fear for his life, Lakshmi . . . . He was reduced to skin and bones in Andaman; his hair, too, had fallen out. He and Babarao are having a grueling time . . . oh *God* . . ."

He sat on the rock and buried his face in his hands. Lakshmi rushed to his side. She put her arms around him and cradled his head to her breast, muttering soothing words. She knew not what she said; he knew not what he heard. He was utterly defenseless, so very vulnerable. Her heart went out to him. With all the warmth and tenderness that was in her she stroked his head and back, pressed him close to her. What solace there was in that tender, soothing touch! How starved he was for that. A few choking sobs escaped his throat. He clung to her tightly.

A delicious warmth was creeping through his blood. It wasn't enough to be holding her so. He wanted more. He pushed aside her pallu and rubbed his cheek against her. His hand reached to open the buttons on her blouse. His eyes feasted greedily on her breasts. She was just like the idols of the goddesses he had seen. He took one dusky nipple into his mouth. Oh heaven! He was just beginning to realize what it was that drove men crazy. He suckled one and then the other. His hands were kneading her all over. He was hardly aware what she was doing. He could feel her fingers running through his hair, on his back. Her little mewls of satisfaction were driving him insane. He pulled her on to his lap, kissing her passionately. Dimly, he became conscious that they were still at the clearing, visible to anyone who could be passing by.

"We must go somewhere more private," he muttered in her ear.

He stood up and carried her to the thicket of trees. Shielded by a tree, they lay in a tangle of arms and legs. But a warning tingle was intruding into Keshu's consciousness. Abruptly, he sat up, common sense washing over him like cold water.

"Ummph . . . !" said Lakshmi, "Keshu . . . ?"

Looking at her, her lips swollen, her eyes glazed, her clothes in disarray, he was very much tempted . . . but wiser counsel prevailed.

"Lakshmi, we have to stop now. I have no experience, you know. I hardly know what I am doing!"

"I wouldn't quite say that . . . !"

Keshu laughed and hugged her to him. "I remember Tatyarao saying my instinct would take over. But not now, here in the dirt and the leaves!"

"He Ram!" cried Lakshmi. "Radhabai will be watching us like a hawk! Oooh . . ."

She scrambled up in a panic, dusting herself and trying to set herself to rights. Keshu lay back, laughing and watching her antics.

"Come on, Keshu. Help me. She is like a mother-in-law to me. I cannot displease her already."

They fixed themselves the best they could. Then Lakshmi gave a sharp cry of dismay. "The rose! Where is the rose?"

A frantic search around the tree did not bring to light any rose. They searched the clearing, and there it was—one mangled, crushed, and utterly abject rose!

"Keshu!" cried Lakshmi. "You crushed it under your feet. Now what are we to do?"

"Hey, why *my* feet? It could well have been you."

Lakshmi swatted his hand. "Don't joke. Radhabai will kill me if I go back without it."

"I think she will kill you if go back with it like *that*," said Keshu, laughing hard. Then, taking pity on her, he said, "It is all right. We will tell her it fell off while riding. She cannot argue with that."

"Oh, *can't* she? She looks like she will argue with the devil."

"Well, so do you, if it comes to that. Anyway, we will stick to that story. She has been married for many years. She will understand, certainly."

Lakshmi was unconvinced. "*He Ram!*" she cried, putting both hands to her cheeks. "I am not coming back here, Keshu, not till we are married!"

The ride back was short, but they lingered along the way as they walked the last lap home. There were many things to discuss.

"I almost forgot," said Keshu. "I have something for you."

Lakshmi waited expectantly while he pulled out a pouch from his inner vest pocket. Inside was a matching gold set of earrings, necklace, and bracelets. Lakshmi's face lit up.

"Jewelry! For *me*? I did so miss wearing it." Society forced widows to forsake every pleasure in life.

"This is my mother's. She was saving it for her daughter-in-law. There is more, a boxful—all of it yours now!"

"My in-laws took away all of mine. They said I didn't need it anymore"—angry tears glistened in her eyes—"it is very, very difficult, to give up everything like that."

Keshu squeezed her hand reassuringly. "I know, Lakshmi. I have seen my mother's plight. Do you know—she had a secret stash of silk saris in her cupboard? She wore them when she set herself on fire—to burn quickly . . ."

"Oh, *Keshu*," cried Lakshmi sorrowfully, "here I am bemoaning my fate, when yours was really so much more dreadful. How did you survive it all?"

"I would rather not talk about it, Lakshmi—"

He had a forlorn, faraway look in his eyes.

"Keshu, where shall we live? At Madhavrao's?" asked Lakshmi, trying to divert his mind from unhappy memories.

"No. Certainly not! We must find a place—and soon!"

"Do you know of any?"

"There is one house, Vijaydurg, in that new development on Prabhat Road. It is available for rent, I think."

"Hmm, it will have modern amenities too! Let us check it out tomorrow."

Fortunately for the two, Radhabai, though shooting plenty of sharp glances, forbore from saying anything on their return.

The next few days flew by on wings. There was a lot to be accomplished in a short time. Lakshmi fell in love with Vijaydurg on sight. It was a dear little house, much smaller than Madhavrao's, of course, but it still had a yard, a shed, and servant's quarters. Radhabai's help was invaluable in putting together some rudimentary furniture and arranging for servants. She called the vendors to her home to buy personal items for Lakshmi, saving a lot of time and energy for all. She also handled the formalities with the Mahilashram. The wedding date was set for February 25. Lakshmi's family—very traditionally bent—had washed their hands off her and would not be present.

February 25: The wedding ceremony went smoothly. A luncheon was arranged at Govindrao's home. Later, the wedding party returned to Madhavrao's house. After a light supper and refreshing themselves, Keshu and Lakshmi went to their new home.

Alone at last, thought Keshu. The last so many days he had hardly seen Lakshmi. Now here they were. Lakshmi was seated on the bed. Keshu shut the bedroom door. There was a slight constraint in the air. How did one go about things? To cover his confusion, Keshu went to light the kerosene lamp on the night table.

"Why do we need that, Keshu? We have electric bulbs in this house," said Lakshmi.

"I am going to take care of that." He flicked the electric switch off. "See how much cozier it is in the lamp light?"

"Yes, but why do we need a light at all? We are going to bed."

"Surely we are not *sleeping* yet!" exclaimed Keshu, quite confused.

Lakshmi blushed. "No-o-o . . . but we don't need a light for *that*!"

"Good God, Lakshmi, I barely know what I am doing here. I am certainly not going to fumble around without a light."

He climbed into bed, arranged the pillows against the headrest, and lay back, pulling Lakshmi against his chest.

"Aah! That's much better," he whispered in her ear. "I have a secret to tell you"—Lakshmi looked up curiously—"I have found a very interesting book in Madhavrao's library. In fact, I brought it here with me."

"You want to talk of books now?"

"Not just any book, Lakshmi! I have been studying it. It is the Kama Sutra."

Lakshmi scrambled up to a sitting position, scandalized. "What! The Kama Sutra! The ancient text on lovemaking! Surely you . . . we . . . are not going to—" she didn't know where to look "—*he Ram!* Does Madhavrao know you took it? What must he think? How can I look him in the face?"

Keshu laughed and pulled her back to him. "Why do you think he has the book? For decoration? I am sure he and Radhabai are putting it to good use"—Lakshmi giggled—"now, Lakshmi, enough about them."

A while later, Keshu lay on his side, pleasurably exhausted. This was life! With Lakshmi tucked under his chin, her back pressed close to his chest, legs tangled, he was only a second away from heavenly oblivion. He felt a gentle tap on his hand. He grunted and kissed Lakshmi's ear.

"Keshu," she whispered.

"Ummm . . .," he murmured, pressing closer.

"Keshu, are you awake?"

"Umm . . . ummm . . ."

There was a rustle of sheets, some nudging and prodding; Lakshmi turned to face him. She patted his cheek.

He opened one eye. "You want to talk? Now?"

She nodded. With a sigh, Keshu sat up a little on the pillows. "But you will have to pay the price!" he warned.

Lakshmi blushed. "It is important. I want to ask you a couple of things."

"Okay, I am awake. Tell me."

Lakshmi lay back in his arms and ran the nail of her pointer finger zigzag fashion down from his throat to his chest, up again and then down. Keshu grabbed her finger and gave it a little nip.

"That feels delicious, but you are making me nervous. What is it, Lakshmi?"

"You are good at the Nayar Martial art, aren't you?"

He gave her a surprised look. "How do you know . . . ?"

"Remember? You mentioned it to Madhavrao, the other day?"

"Oh yes, of course!"

"And you know some Chinese techniques too," said Lakshmi, coming back to the point.

"Ye-e-s. The Chinese moves I learned from a convict in Andaman. A friend in Pongur taught me the Nayar Martial art."

"Well then, can you teach me some self-defense moves?" she blurted out.

"Self-defense! Is that what you want?"

She nodded.

"Well, it could be done, I suppose. But you could get hurt."

"Oh, Keshu, please? I am very tough, really. I was quite an athletic child—always running about, climbing trees, and swimming too. How useful it will be to be able to protect myself."

"You have me to protect you."

"Yes, but you can't always be there. Besides, I could then teach the ladies at the Mahilashram too. Men are such *beasts*; women need to take care of themselves."

"Yes," said Keshu, impressed by this argument. "Yes, that is a good idea. I'll teach you, and we will see how it goes, all right?"

"Oh Keshu!" said Lakshmi, flinging her arms around his neck.

"That was easy. What next?"

Lakshmi's finger started the zigzag journey again.

"Not that torture again. Lakshmi!" said Keshu, catching her finger again. "Come on, out with it."

"Well . . . well . . ."

"Yes?" encouraged Keshu.

"Keshu, I want to continue working—"

She paused, seeing Keshu's pensive look as he digested her words, then rushed into speech: "After becoming a widow, I trained as a nurse. It wasn't easy learning to stand on my own feet. I don't want to give it up. Nursing is such a meaningful—"

Keshu put a finger to her mouth. "Lakshmi, I haven't refused. I was only thinking. Perhaps I should have come up with the idea myself. I do believe women should not be helpless. I have seen my mother's helplessness and dependency and *hated* it. If you really want to do it, why not?"

"Really?" said Lakshmi, delighted. "You won't change your mind in the morning?"

"No. No, I won't. You will keep some reasonable working hours, won't you?"

Lakshmi nodded.

"Tell me, Lakshmi, why ask me now?"

"We-e-ell," said Lakshmi, peeping at him demurely. "What better time is there?"

Keshu caught her to him tighter and rolled over, taking her along.

"*Eeee! Keshu!*" exclaimed Lakshmi, laughing.

"You are a little devil, Lakshmi, but I can do the same, you know. I have something to tell you too."

At her inquiring look, he added, "We are going to get you a horse."

"Oh *no*, Keshu, not a horse . . . ! Ride alone . . . I *cannot*!"

"Well, my Athletic One, you will be surprised how much you will enjoy it! We'll get you a gentle one and call him Badal, after the horse of Lakshmibai, Queen of Jhansi."

As she was about to protest, he put a finger to her lips. "Shh . . . it is time to pay the price now. We are done talking!"

The days slipped by in an idyllic manner. Thanks to Radhabai and Madhavrao, their introduction into Poona society was smooth—more or less. Not everyone was welcoming, but out of respect for Madhavrao, there was no *drastic* opposition to this extremely unconventional couple. Soon Keshu started

work as Madhavrao's aide and Lakshmi was back to work at the hospital.

* * *

Gandhi had promised Indians freedom at the end of one year of the Noncooperation Movement. With the national love pulsating and throbbing avidly in every Indian heart, it seemed that independence was within reach. Flush with the success of his movement, Gandhi put aside his normal toadying policy toward the British and wrote a challenging letter to the Viceroy. The British reprisal was swift; *poof* went their indulgence of Gandhi! The Viceroy's press release of February 6, 1922, was practically a declaration of war against the movement. The British were *not* going to crumble and give freedom to the Indians just for the asking.

Now was the time for Gandhi to make a momentous decision. *Now* was the time to push ahead. Freedom was, perhaps, an inch away. The people of India, enthralled by their spiritual, charismatic leader, were ready to go to any extreme at a word from Gandhi—but that word was *not* given.

Though he gave the Viceroy an initial rejoinder, Gandhi's challenge to the Viceroy was but empty words. Incomprehensibly—grasping at straws . . . ?—he used a single, localized incident of violence as an excuse to call off the movement. On February 5 in Chauri Chaura, a group of harassed, victimized people had committed an act of violence in retaliation to police brutality.[63] The independence of an entire country sacrificed for this one incident . . . ! Gandhi—*unmoved*

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63 A sub-inspector in Chauri Chaura had assaulted protesters of the Nonviolent Movement at Mundera Bazar. On February 5, 1922, protesters assembled before the police station in Chauri Chaura demanding an explanation from the guilty official. The police opened fire on them . . . ! When they had exhausted all their ammunition they locked themselves up inside the police station and refused to come out. The maddened protesters then set fire to the police station. The police remained inside the burning building and were burned to death.

by the violent Moplah Rebellion,[64] *unmoved* by the violent government reprisals, *unmoved* by the rioting[65]—declared himself unable to digest this *one* incident. The Indians were not deserving of attaining freedom; the Mahatma decreed it so! The freedom movement was off . . . !

With that, Gandhi and the Congress had extricated themselves—most conveniently and without losing face—from the responsibility of giving Indians the promised freedom at the end of one year!

The Indians who had supported this movement were left high and dry, with the wrath of the Government crashing on their heads. India was plunged into gloom. The freedom movement was now practically at a standstill.

In September 1922, when the Government feared that Babarao's last days were imminent any day, they released him into the hands of his brother Narayanrao. Babarao was now free. Shantabai, Narayanrao's wife, nursed him with great care and brought him back from death's door.

Savarkar was released from the remainder of his fifty-year jail sentence on January 6, 1924, and exiled to the Ratnagiri District—a remote and difficult to access backwater—in the

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64 **Gandhi's calm acceptance of the violent Moplah riots:** "Hindus must find the causes of Moplah fanaticism. They will find that they are not without blame. They have hitherto not cared for the Moplah. It is no use now becoming angry with the Moplahs or Mussalmans in general." *The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol. 22,* page 269; Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, 1966.

Gandhi-quote in his *Young India* of September 29, 1921: "The ending of the Moplah revolt is a matter not only of urgency, but of simple humanity. The Hindus must have the courage and the faith to feel that they can protect their religion in spite of such fanatical eruptions. . . . Be the Moplahs be ever so bad, they deserve to be treated as human beings."

65 **To name but one other incident of violence where policemen were killed—though Gandhi did *not* call off the Noncooperation Movement for it:** "When the Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) visited Bombay in November 1921, protests degenerated into mob violence with looting. Some policemen were beaten to death; in three days of riots 58 Bombay citizens were killed, and four hundred were injured." *World Peace Efforts since Gandhi,* Sanderson Beck; World Peace Communications.

Bombay Presidency.[66] This release from prison only gave him an appearance of being free. Though allowed to live in a private home, he was restricted to this district and had to stay away from politics until further notice. He was not allowed to work as a barrister either. A *very* close watch was kept on him by the police—unexpected house raids were the norm, and his every written and spoken word scrutinized and questioned. *Every* precaution was taken by the Government to keep his wings clipped.

Savarkar still managed to continue working for his cause clandestinely—despite the *acute* threat of his fifty-year sentence being reinstated if a whisper—or even a suspicion—of his activities leaked out.

Keshu and Lakshmi packed up their bags immediately and moved to Ratnagiri to throw in their lot with Savarkar.

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66 Provinces were called presidencies before 1935.

PART II

Chapter Ten

1938

Over the past fourteen years since 1924, the British government had taken baby steps toward dominion status. A Government of India Act was passed in 1935. It sought to bring some political unity between the British-ruled Indian provinces and the 562 Indian Princely States that owed allegiance to the British. Though not perfect by any means, this Act had a great advantage. It offered provincial autonomy and required, with at least 50 percent representation from the Princely States, that a central federation be formed. A strong center would hold all the varied parts of India together when the British finally left.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, opposed the federation; it was a hindrance to his plans for the partition of India. The Princely States were uncertain as to how the federation would affect their independent status and wobbled on the issue. The Congress, the only national party that dominated Indian politics, had its own agenda. In various ways it was seeking to be the *only* representative of a free India. Democracy in free India would be in name only, if Congress had its way! Federation and the Act did not suit its agenda either.

The Congress members were bent on following a *peculiar* policy: boycotting or opposing every concession the Government made; boycotting *every* census, resulting

in a distorted headcount of the Hindus—even though these census results were used to determine Hindu-Muslim majority in a region; and alienating the Princely States by attacking them—*only* the Hindu ones—for not being democratic.

Also, having won a landslide majority in the elections in six provinces—by getting the Hindu votes—they refused to form the provincial ministries . . . ! But in this they over-played their hand. The new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, simply asked the Governors to form coalition ministries with the non-Congress elected members. The government machinery continued unimpaired. Gandhi, by now the undisputed leader of the Congress, was flummoxed. He made several fruitless overtures to the Viceroy suggesting that Congress ministers would, upon conditions, accept their office. Lord Linlithgow was unmoved. Eventually Congress had to back down and take office unconditionally!

Gandhi, though not a member of the Congress now, still ruled it with an iron hand—in a velvet glove. All members had to toe the line to his way of thinking or be kicked out. He frequently flouted the Congress Working Committee decisions and always met the Viceroy as the sole representative of the Congress. Even in the second Round Table Conference in 1931, which was supposed to lead to great things, Gandhi went alone—much to the consternation of his second in command, Jawaharlal Nehru—whereas the Viceroy had given an allowance for sixteen Congress members! This disastrous conference resulted in Prime Minister Ramsay announcing the Communal Award giving weighted special electorates to the minorities—a precursor to the disaster to come.

Unopposed by Congress, the powerful leading national party of India, the electoral system of India, and therefore the Constitution of India, was now based on *communal* lines—Hindus could vote for Hindus only, Muslims for the Muslims, and same for the other reserved seats.

The politics of the Congress far, far from moving toward the much-touted Hindu-Muslim unity, in actual fact, lead to an unequivocal *division* among the Indians.

* * *

August 30: It was not yet seven o'clock in the evening. The compartment was cloaked in a nightly gloom. The train wheels spun rhythmically—chhickity-chhak, chhickity-chhak—interrupted only by the occasional hoot of the engine whistle and a sporadic snoring. Gajanan Damle, Savarkar's secretary, was fast asleep in an upper bunk. He was exhausted. They all were. Fortunately, this time they were travelling separated from the others in the individual first-class bogie just for the three of them—Savarkar, Gajanan, and Keshu; at least, no one could disturb them between stations.

Keshu let out a heartfelt sigh, his eyes roaming on the slight, fragile figure asleep on the neighboring bunk. Life was so very different now; sleep was a rare commodity. They had to grab their shut-eye when and where they could. Since Savarkar's unconditional release on May 10, 1937—free after twenty-seven years!—he had flung himself into the political field, heart and soul, for the saving of Hindustan. The pressure was on.

Keshu leaned back on his pillow, hands behind his head, pondering the situation in India. The gullible majority of India—the Hindus—had entrusted their future, their freedom, into such hands as Gandhi's! This charismatic virtual dictator of Congress had them enslaved. He had whipped the Congress into being an efficient machine, but used it for the propaganda of his own ideas. He had collected massive funds from the people, established a solid industrial backing—despite being against industrialization!—and had the media in his pocket. Money, Voice, and an established national party—he had it all! The lack of political values and foresight, even the lack of a concrete plan for freedom, all was hidden from the public by clever press coverage.

The only concrete agenda Congress seemed to have had for years was Gandhi's *charkha,* spinning wheel, campaign. Millions of people had been provided with one. Apparently, it was to be a tool by which freedom would be won; even the Congress flag sported the spinning wheel. *Tcha!*

By now, a Pan-Islamic movement had taken firm root under the leadership of Jinnah, a shrewd politician with but one thought: a Muslim Pakistan gouged out from the heart of Hindustan. His dislike of the Congress, Gandhi, and Nehru was patent in his every move and colored his every decision. If care was not taken, India would be scattered into many different pieces, all fighting each other. Currently, there was a race between Jinnah and Congress to win over Muslim hearts—to get the Muslim votes—Congress by appeasement and Jinnah by appealing through Islam. To open the eyes of the Hindus to the reality was going to be a monumental task!

Thank God the Government had finally released Tatyarao! The full force of his formidable personality could be unleashed in the saving of their motherland. Would Tatyarao's precarious health—a bounty from the days of his incarceration—hold up, though?

Keshu stirred restlessly, casting anxious eyes toward Savarkar. Yes, his sleep was disturbed.

"Tatyarao," whispered Keshu, "you can rest for a little while more."

Savarkar sat up. "No, Keshu. I have rested enough."

He looked out of the open window. Tiny particles of coal escaping the engine stung his face. Screwing his eyes to guard against any accosting his unwary eyes, he peered devotedly upon the passing scenery. A vast scrubland with trees dotted here and there stretched to the horizon, bathed in the purplish-blue of the night sky. Suddenly the train came to a grinding halt.

"Look, Keshu," Savarkar breathed, "how peaceful our motherland appears! *Our* land! We are heading west this tour, to the land of the Indus, where lies the heart of our motherland. Let no one—*no one*—rip the heart out of our Hindustan! Those

seeds are sown in today's politics, but I must prevent them from taking root, I *must*!" His voice throbbed with anguish and passion.

"Tatyarao, you will, you will!" cried Keshu, forgetting the sleeping Gajanan. "You have to take great care, though. There is danger. Just a few months ago, in Sholapur, the Congress there had ordered a hit on you! The picture of the hit man, dagger in hand, ready to pierce your heart still has me breaking out in sweat. Thank God, he turned out to be Shera from Andaman. Had he not recognized you in the nick of time . . . ! Then there was that Sadubhau who physically attacked you in the public meeting in Poona . . ."

"Yes, Keshu, the danger is real. But I have you as my bodyguard now. We take precautions, don't we? Didn't I give in to Acharya Atre's[67] insistence that we change plans and board the train at an earlier station? He was convinced that an attack on me was planned. I always carry a dagger in my jacket pocket and wear a protective vest—not too much more I can do. My work must go on!"

"Why cannot different political parties coexist?" cried Keshu. "Why does Congress want to squash all opposing voices? We haven't got freedom still, and *yet* the power play goes on. Well, their black flags and media denigration of you got them nowhere. The people love you regardless. What a hero's welcome you receive everywhere!"—Savarkar smiled—"I laugh remembering Jaju, that Congress leader in Sholapur; he would have you seated on a donkey and paraded! Acharya Atre trounced him in the media declaring that you would then ride on Jaju's shoulders, for there was no better donkey!"

Savarkar laughed and then sobered. "My words have reached the Bombay Province, but that is not enough! All of Hindustan needs to be aware of the pitfalls in our freedom movement. Congress will come into power with the Hindu votes and *yet* will sacrifice their rights to appease the Muslims. The Hindus

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67 A famous ready Wit in the Bombay Province.

must be made to see that—and they must have an alternative party to vote for." Savarkar's eyes glowed in the gloom. "The rest of this tour—Nagarkot, Karachi, and Sukkur—is *vital*."

"Tatyarao, you are doing your utmost; you have sacrificed self and wealth already, deliberately joined the Hindu Mahasabha, and accepted its presidency—though it is only at the embryo stage politically—*just* for that reason. You *could* have joined the Congress, otherwise."

"I know, Keshu, that in the Congress, I could rise to power; have a brilliant future in free India, in fact. *But* for that I have to follow Gandhi's whimsical, suicidal path to freedom—throwing away my principles and sacrificing the integrity of Hindustan. That I can *never* do! Till my last breath I will work to save my people." Restless, he stood up.

In that moment the train shuddered to a start. Gajanan woke up with a jerk.

"Wha . . . ! Tatyarao! You are up already! Is it time to get off?"

"Soon, Gajanan!" replied Savarkar, going into the bathroom to get refreshed.

"Gajanan," said Keshu, "our stay here is in the Lake Palace of the Maharaja, isn't it? I have heard it is very beautiful."

"Yes, indeed. Tatyarao very badly needs some respite. As a president building up his party, his tours are so hectic. Every minute of the day is accounted for; meetings are lined up consecutively by the hour!" said Gajanan, climbing down from his bunk and sitting next to Keshu.

"Time is running out, Gajanan. He will not let himself rest. I have seen his anguish and pain, the tears he has shed for the plight of our Hindustan."

"Yes, Keshurao, that is why I am devoted to him. He is wonderful! So active in politics and still doesn't slack off from his social work. Somehow we squeeze in the all-caste community dinners—so essential for his war on social inequities—into his tight tour schedule!"

"Those days in Ratnagiri were something else, weren't they, Gajanan?" Keshu reminisced. "Tatyarao and his war to smash

the birth-based caste system existing in society . . . ! How he fought for the rights of the ex-untouchables!"

Hindu society was divided into rigid birth-based castes. On the lowest stratum were the "untouchables"; they were considered impure and treated worse than animals—not allowed to enter temples, be in any public places, nor drink water from public places. Their children were not allowed in public schools, though they were taxpayers. They were not even allowed to pass higher-caste Hindus on the street! Savarkar was on the warpath to shatter such abhorrent practices. Freedom and equality for all—that was his ideal! In Ratnagiri, he had the Patit Pavan Temple built with equal rights for all Hindus as its main feature; even the priests could be non-Brahmins . . . !

He had also opened a restaurant catering to everyone. Food here was cooked and served by ex-untouchables, to the horror of more traditionally bent Hindus. Patrons of this restaurant were likely to suffer a social boycott. It was managed by Gajanan; Keshu helped out as much as he could. Many times they pitched in to do all the jobs, including cleaning and washing up.

Gajanan put in, "No one dared break his two rules—all who wished to meet him *had* to eat at our restaurant *and* visit the Patit Pavan Temple."

Keshu laughed. "I remember how bewildered Yusuf Meher Ali, the Muslim socialist, was to find himself inside the temple when he visited Tatyarao!"

"The foolishness of the traditional Brahmins, ranting and raving at Tatyarao so!" cried Gajanan scornfully. "What do they expect? He who boldly faces the wrath of the British Imperialism will quake at their bleating? Not a stone does he leave unturned. He even got the government officials to work with him in ensuring that public schools were open for the ex-untouchable children."

"Weren't the officials flabbergasted? Savarkar, the 'most dangerous revolutionary' working amicably with the Government!"

"It was *most* comical!"

"Just a tyke you were when you took to the streets with Tatyarao, promoting *swadeshi*[68]—"

"I was fourteen!" protested Gajanan, straightening up, to make the most of his 5' 6" frame.

Keshu smiled. He had seen Gajanan grow up from a skinny teenager to this stocky young man of twenty-seven, his square face so serious until he broke out into his sudden laughter. He was devoted to Savarkar.

"Yes, Gajanan!" said Keshu. "You and your friends were his 'monkey band'—just like that of Shri Ram! What a great time we all had hawking swadeshi goods on a cart. Tatyarao was a sight to see! He got quite adept at the job of making mattresses too."

They heard Savarkar coming out and fell silent.

The train drew in gradually at the Paali station. Savarkar was ready in fresh clothes—a crisp white shirt, black jacket, dhoti,[69] and his favorite black, rimless, round cap. People, many with flower garlands, crowded on the platform. Keshu, towering over everyone, got down first, scanning the crowd for danger. The organizers greeted them, and then people were allowed to approach Savarkar in as much order as could be managed. Savarkar was almost buried under the garlands they put around his neck. He spoke but not much could be heard. People were happy just to hear his voice. Some fell at his feet to pay homage.

Savarkar protested strongly at this: "Brothers, pray do not prostrate yourself at my feet. I am extremely opposed to this manner of paying respect!"

"But Tatyarao, you have done and are doing so much for us, for our country—this is the highest form of respect in the Hindu dharma. You cannot stop us," one said.

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68 Practice of using indigenously made products.

69 Draped cloth used by males to cover the lower half of the body.

Much the same was happening in every town. He just could not convince those who loved him that he *really* did not like it. He was heralded by people at every station the train halted. They wanted to hear him talk, touch him, fall at his feet—they loved him so.

Slowly the whole entourage had been moving toward the exit. The organizers separated them from the crowd, leading them to a quiet spot where a lone car was parked under a tree. Suddenly Savarkar stopped short, beckoned Gajanan, and whispered something in his ears. Looking a little surprised, Gajanan retraced his steps. Not many minutes later he joined them in the car. The delicious aroma of *puri-bhaji*[70] wafted in the close confines of the car. Keshu eyed the packet in Gajanan's hand.

"Is that . . . ?"

"Yes, Keshu," said Savarkar.

"But Tatyarao," protested Keshu, "we are going to a palace! Is it not odd to arrive there with our own food?"

"Perhaps, Keshu, but I just felt like it."

Keshu gave himself a mental kick. Just how often did Tatyarao indulge himself? Why was he picking at him?

The car sped swiftly. The night was dark, the road dusty and bumpy. They all looked forward to journey's end.

"Bahadur," Keshu said to the driver, "what is that coming up?"

"Saheb, that is the palace."

"But it is so dark! Why are there no lights?"

"I don't know, Saheb. Perhaps the electricity has failed."

The car came to a halt. The three tired occupants and Jadhav, one of the organizers, trooped out. The driver, after depositing their luggage on the ground, drove away.

"I think there is a long flight of steps there," guessed Gajanan, peering into the gloom. "And ahead that great looming thing

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70 Fried bread and spiced potato.

must be the beautiful palace. Oh, what a welcome! Why is there no sign of anyone? Jadhav, we are expected, aren't we?"

"Yes, yes, Gajananrao," said Jadhav, much harassed. "Some problem has come up, I am sure!"

"Look! There is a shadow moving there! Hey! Hey you!" shouted Keshu sharply. "Bring us a lantern, will you?"

"Keshu," reprimanded Savarkar, "that we are tired does not excuse our behavior. Why shout so rudely at the poor man? They are all doing their best, I am sure." Keshu was abashed. "Come, the steps are here. They must lead somewhere. Let us climb."

Savarkar set off up the steps with determination, and the rest of them followed. The man, just a shadowy figure, hurriedly caught up with them.

"Saheb, the electricity is not working. It is very unfortunate!" he said apologetically. "A car has been sent to town to get lanterns. It should be here soon—there! There it comes." There was such relief in his voice!

A couple of men rushed toward them with the lanterns but dared not go ahead of Savarkar—so resolutely climbing. They trailed behind, holding the lanterns high up to give light. Keshu had an irresistible urge to laugh. What an odd picture they made—walking ahead of the light in the wake of their shadows dancing so grotesquely upon the steps.

Once inside, Jadhav seated them in the vast entrance hall with one lantern for company and disappeared into the gloom. An elegant fountain strewn with red rose petals was a dominant feature of the hall. The cascading water murmured gently. The soothing fragrance of rose wafted over. Still the wait in the gloom was unnerving. Keshu pulled out his watch and peered at it.

"It is 9:30 almost. I wonder how much longer they will take?"

Even as he spoke, Jadhav was before them. "I will take you to your rooms, Tatyarao."

Thankfully, they all trooped up an elegant curved staircase, traversing a few hallways to reach their rooms.

"I shall check on the arrangements and be back," said Jadhav and left quickly.

"Tcha!" exclaimed Keshu. "I didn't get a chance to ask him about dinner. They *will* be feeding us, won't they, Tatyarao?"

"We can only wait and find out," replied Savarkar.

Their arrangement was made in a suite of two rooms. Gajanan and Keshu shared one, and the other was for Savarkar. As they had only one lantern, they hung out in Savarkar's room. Keshu prowled around peering at the exquisite décor. Time ticked slowly by.

"Tatyarao," Keshu said when he could bear the hunger pangs no more, "do you think we could eat the puri-bhaji?"

Savarkar laughed. "What! Now you do appreciate my indulgence?"

"Oh yes, Tatyarao, very much so!" said Keshu ruefully. "I am so hungry, and everything in this palace is so very odd. It seems more like a prison than anything else."

For a moment the shared memory of the Cellular Jail hung between them like a specter. Savarkar broke the tension. "Let us by all means eat, Keshu."

The three hungry men devoured the food, feeling much better for it.

"Tatyarao," said Gajanan, "perhaps we should settle down for the night. We have a heavy day tomorrow. In their crisis they have forgotten about us!"

Suddenly the room lit up. The electricity was functioning again. They blinked in the brightness. Within minutes there was a knock on the door.

It was Jadhav with a servant. "Tatyarao, let me escort you to dinner."

Dinner! All three looked guiltily at each other. There was no way out, though. They made their way to the most elaborate and elegant dining room they had ever seen and forced a second meal down their throats.

Back in their rooms, Keshu groaned. "I feel as if I shall burst. They plied us with so much food, not taking no for an answer."

"Did you actually refuse any food, Keshu? Not that I noticed!" laughed Savarkar.

"Well . . . ," said Keshu, a bit at a loss but recovering swiftly, "how could I? It was the most delicious spread . . . !" He groaned again. "I am paying for the gluttony, though! If I wasn't afraid of getting lost in this maze, I would go for a walk."

The next morning Keshu was up early. He went out on the tiny balcony with the decorative railing and typical stone umbrella awning. Their room overlooked the lake. It was an awesome sight! The water gleamed and glistened in the pink of the dawn. There was a little morning chill. Curls of mist were rising up in the sky. In the backdrop the hills stood mutely on guard. Keshu checked his watch. There was time for a quick run. He was getting on now, almost forty years old! Keshu flexed his powerful muscles. Keeping fit was a challenge. With their erratic schedule, outdoor pursuits were not always possible. He had to rely on indoor exercise and yoga. Deciding to brave the confusing passages, he headed out. Oh, what joy there was in the nature here! He wished Lakshmi were here in this romantic place. Lakshmi . . . how patiently she bore his busy schedule and tours away from home, never a complaint. He returned just in time to get ready.

Their breakfast was scheduled at the quarters of the Hindu Seva Mandal, the organizer of the whole tour. On the way, Savarkar said, "This is an extremely crucial tour. Hindus of Sind have to be consolidated. Their position is very vulnerable. By falling for Jinnah's persuasive words they, too, clamored for separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency. And *now*, rather than being part of a majority there, they are a minority in Sind. Partition spells doom for them—Sind will certainly go to Pakistan!"

"Is partition such a reality, Tatyarao?" asked Gajanan.

"I very much hope not, Gajanan, but we shouldn't be caught napping!"

"Everything makes so much sense when you point it out, Tatyarao," said Keshu.

"I can only do my best, Keshu. Thanks to the Congress Muslim-appeasement policy, we are giving up our rights—don't we have weighted separate electorates for the Muslims already? It is not easy to spot piecemeal, but collectively it all poses disaster for United India and the Hindus. Jinnah is like the spoiled brat who throws a tantrum for more and more, and Congress the helpless mother who caves in to its demands. I won't be surprised if the Congress will quash our beloved freedom song, *Vande Mataram*, altogether at the demand of the Muslims!"

"I do hope that the Hindus wake up; they are so steeped in Gandhism right now."

"Yes, Keshu, the Hindus have lost the ability to defend themselves. Muslims will pick up arms any day at the call of Jihad, and the Sikhs will wage a war in their own defense. Only the Hindus are like lambs for slaughter. The guise of nonviolence has finished the task—started by the British—of emasculating the Hindus. If we were to get freedom today, even without partition, do you think we would survive three days? A civil war will utterly rout the Hindus. Don't forget, the military personnel and officers are mostly Muslims."

"That is a dismal picture, indeed! After withstanding a thousand years of Muslim reign, of successfully resisting conversion and not losing our Hindu integrity—that we may stand to lose it all in a snap of the fingers is horrendous. Become an Afghanistan! *Never!* Hard to believe that in the bygone days, Afghanistan was a proud Hindu nation!"

"In the event of partition, Punjab and Sind shall be the first victims. Our holy land, the birthplace of Hindu civilization, the Land of the Indus, shall be chopped off from us. It is unbearable, *unbearable*!" He shook his head to dislodge this terrible thought.

A somber silence reigned in the car.

Upon their arrival at the office, the three leaders, Mahant Narsingdas, Khairatiram Agarwal, and Premraj, were there personally to greet them. A big program was arranged. After

breakfast, as they waited for the car to take them to the procession, there was a knock on the door. A big, broad man with curling mustaches, dressed in an officer's uniform, was before them.

"Barrister Savarkar!"[71] he said, grabbing Savarkar's hands in both of his and then fell silent.

Savarkar was nonplussed. He was used to meeting people of all types and varying reactions, but this was very odd indeed.

"Barrister," the man continued, "my name is Kothiwala. I am the Chief of Police here"—*good God! The Chief himself!*—"I am the wretched policeman who was handcuffed to your wrist in Bombay in 1911, on your way to Andaman. I have come to offer my help now. On my insistence, my car shall carry you in the procession. *Do*, please, forgive me for my past encroachment."

"Kothiwala, you were only doing your duty. I won't reproach you for that! I encourage Hindus to join the army, to get government jobs. Be there and work for the good of our country as much as possible, I say. In free India, we will need experienced officers and a working machinery to function, won't we? I am much obliged by your offer of help. We need all the help we can get to save our country."

Kothiwala, though completely overwhelmed, sat with them until it was time to leave for the procession.

The procession arrangements were very elaborate. In every town they had been so far, the organizers outdid themselves in pomp and show. All along the street thousands of people lined the edge, many with flower garlands. More were hanging out of the windows and on terraces. Shouts of "Hail Veer[72] Savarkar!" and "Hail Hindu dharma!" reverberated in the sky. All the traffic had to be redirected. The procession was led by four decorated bullock carts. The powerful bullocks swung their

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71 Savarkar had completed his education in law in London, though the Benchers of Gray's Inn had refused to call him to the bar at the instigation of the British government.

72 Brave, heroic.

heads to the beat of their jangling jewelry. Then followed the cyclist band in twos, with the groups of local gyms displaying their skill at *lejhim* and *dandpatta*, the two-armed sword dueling. Riders on gallant white horses proudly waved the Pan-Hindu flag adopted by the Hindu Mahasabha. Savarkar, with Keshu, Gajanan, and Khairatilal, sat in Kothiwala's open car moving slowly behind the procession. The car was heavily decorated with flowers. A canopy of flowers, looking deceptively innocuous, protected their heads from more than the sun. Its frame was made of iron to ward off any objects or stones miscreants might throw. A band of guards were appointed at several points along the way to take care of any mischief-makers. Several times the procession came to a complete halt as people clamored to garland Savarkar. A special man was appointed just to take the garlands away from the car! Eventually they made it to the maidan[73] where the assembly was arranged.

The formalities were taken care of. Savarkar was felicitated and handed a purse. It was time for his speech. People roared in anticipation. Savarkar's oratory was well known. Everyone quieted down to a hush and listened intently as Savarkar's voice filled the maidan. "Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the great honor you confer upon me with these flower garlands. It makes true the words in my poem: 'happily wear the shackles; there will be a day when they will turn to flowers!' But flowers have thorns too. So many of my compatriots are no more! I survived. I am proof of the fact that despite the unendurable hardship heaped upon us, we can still live to fight for our motherland! I, with the help of you all, intend to do just that. The object of our worship is the Goddess of Freedom. Some try to hinder my progress. To them I say, let the ways and means differ, but the temple is one. Lokmanya Tilak did not entirely agree with my ways. Sometimes he called me a reckless boy, they say. But did he come in my way, or consider me his enemy? No!

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73 Open ground.

Today, the situation is dismal for the Hindus. Our heroes are stigmatized as treacherous or misguided, and our noble patriots and prophets are decried as narrow-minded men. Our spiritual leader, Swami Shraddhananda, was even murdered by a Muslim, in 1926. Today it is a crime to defend the legitimate, civil, religious, cultural, and economic rights of the Hindus in their own land! *Why* is the issue of special rights for Muslims being brought up again and again? We have Jews, Parsis, and Christians all living here accepting Hindustan as their country. Have they ever claimed special rights? Demanded separate electorates? No! So why the special rights only for the Muslims? It is preposterous to give one vote to three Hindus and three votes to one Muslim! In our free Hindustan, rights of all, majority or minority, must be equal!

We very much appreciate the services of Mahatma Gandhi and the other leaders for creating a spirit of awakening in our country, for taking the freedom movement into the homes of the masses. But we *must* stringently oppose their appeasing policy toward the Muslims. The Muslims are rioting all the year round in various places, killing and raping Hindus, converting them, destroying their property—yet this is being whitewashed by the Congress as the work of ruffians. Why would the 'ruffians' target only the Hindus? Why would 'ruffians' spare those that prove they are Muslim? Why would 'ruffians' spare the property of the rich Muslims? No, we are not fooled!

In Kashmir, where Hindus are in minority, I can predict that if anti-Hindu forces there are not checked in time, Hindus will be in grave danger. I also utterly denounce Mahatma Gandhi's ill-advice to the Maharaja of Kashmir to abdicate to the Muslim majority there and retire to do penance in Benares! And if that is the way to go—why does he not advise the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Bhopal to abdicate to their Hindu majority and retire to Mecca?—is it because they are Muslim?

It is my goal to establish an independent Hindustan on the bedrock of the national majority—the Hindus—on the basis of Hindutva; of course, leaving behind the rigid rituals and smashing the barriers of the birth-based caste system.

Let us not confuse Hindutva with Hinduism. Hinduism relates to the religious system of the Hindus. Let the religion concern itself with the salvation of life after death, with the concept of God and universe. Hindutva

incorporates the cultural, social, political, and linguistic aspect. A nation is defined as a group of mankind bound together by some or all of the ties of common culture and religion, a common history and traditions, a common language and literature, a common consciousness of rights and wrongs, occupying a territory of geographical unity and aspiring to form a political unit. By definition therefore, Hindus are a nation. Hindus of Hindustan are all those who recognize it as their fatherland and their holy land. Forty centuries, if not more, have been at work to mold Hindutva.

The followers of Vedism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and the hill tribes all are undoubtedly Hindus. The Parsis have made Hindustan their only home. Jews of Hindustan have given no political or cultural trouble and are easily assimilated in a common Indian State. The Christians, too, have had no extraterritorial political designs against Hindustan and are not linguistically and culturally averse to the Hindus, therefore can be easily assimilated into it—the conversions, however, should be made voluntarily and on a legitimate basis. Only the Muslim minority is making a problem. As citizens of free India, Muslims would have the same rights as the others in everything but would be held as suspicious friends for a few years for the extraterritorial designs they entertain. The Muslims of Hindustan have never identified their aspirations with the national aspirations of Hindustan.

We Hindus must not betray or break up the continuity of our Nation from the Sindhus in Rigvedic days to the Hindus of our own generation which is implied in "Hindustan," the accepted appellation of our motherland. Why should that be distorted by the clamor of a minority community, the Muslims? Poland, Greece, China—all have thousands of Muslims as their nationals. Yet the country of the Poles is Poland, of the Greeks is Greece, and of the Chinese is China! The Muslims there have not distorted that. Muslims here have been happy to identify themselves as 'Hindustani Muslims' for years! Up until recently, the international press referred to all people of Hindustan, irrespective of religion, as Hindus.

Just as the land of the Germans is Germany, of the English England, of the Turks Turkistan, of the Afghans Afghanistan—even so we must have it indelibly impressed on the map of the earth for all times to come a Hindustan—the land of the Hindus.

The Congress slogan of 'no swaraj without Hindu-Muslim unity' has become a very efficient tool for Muslims to demand and get their concessions.

The Government, too, holds it as a loaded gun to the head of the national demand for freedom. For a majority to go on its knees to a recalcitrant minority is very unjust!

O Hindus, wake up! Elect people who will protect your rights.

Today, our Mother is on her death bed crying to be saved! We must save her! Not by being passive; not by indulging in the fine things in life; and not by clamoring to be thrown in the jails! Though the Congress regards 'jail seeking' as the royal road to independence, it is merely a road to personal prestige and power.

We must have independence! An independence where the weal and welfare, culture and honor of the Hindus will flourish! It is better to die in the thick of battle for this righteous cause than to be a silent witness to its defeat.

Our ultimate goal, of course, is not nationalism but humanism. But today's world is far indeed from that concept. To reach our ultimate goal, we must *first* survive in today's world. To survive we need to defend ourselves and our motherland against the military might of the invaders. History worldwide is replete with examples of how the might of the sword has vanquished and destroyed fine civilizations! It is happening today. The Europeans are ruling so many countries by force. Wake up, O Hindus, wake up! Down with the Arms Act! Let us pick up rifles and become soldiers worthy of defending our country.

O youngsters, do not lose yourselves in the prattle of love. My heart bleeds in anguish to see today's youth lost in love, when our Mother lies enslaved. *Nothing* flourishes in a slave country—not literature, not science, not culture. To be free and survive as a free nation, our Mother needs the power of arms for protection.

My final appeal to you, O ladies and gentlemen, is to work toward Hindu consolidation and Hindu militarization—therein lies our Mother's salvation, her honor, her freedom!"

Everyone had listened spellbound the entire time. With the end of the speech the sky reverberated with shouts of "Hail Veer Savarkar!" and "Hail Hindu dharma!" again.

There was no time for Savarkar to linger. He and his entourage rushed to the Marathi Mandal program and from there to the Jashwant Mahavidyalay. Here, in the school for

boys, he focused on militarization in his speech. There was time only for a quick but most essential meeting with the organizers regarding how to establish the Hindu Mahasabha in these areas before it was time to catch the evening train to Nagarkot.

Chapter Eleven

October-December 1938

In July, the Savarkar brothers, Gajanan, and Keshu had moved into Savarkar Sadan, a two-story building in Dadar, Bombay. In the front yard warmly welcoming all was the auspicious tulsi, lovingly planted by Mai, Savarkar's wife Yamuna. Four doors opened out of the entrance hall. Narayanrao and his family lived in the apartment to the left, Babarao in rooms to the right, and Gajanan in a small alcove by the staircase. The first door to the right led to the main staircase which was also accessed from the outside. A central hall operated as the office of the Hindu Mahasabha. All paperwork, meetings, and general discussions took place here. The second-floor entrance hall led to Savarkar and his family's apartment to the left and Keshu and Lakshmi's to the right. The center room above the HM office served as a private office for Savarkar.

The house had a yard planted with fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Savarkar loved it. Even with his busy schedule, he did generally make time to soak in the natural beauty of nature. A breath of fresh air in his own yard was a soothing balm to his stressed brain. His family eagerly grabbed this time to be with him—Mai got the buckets and watered the plants, while the kids, his own, Vishwas and Prabhat, and Narayanrao's, Ashok, Vikram, Shriharsh, and sometimes even baby Chapala, pottered around him.

October 7: Keshu was retiring for the day to his apartment. They had just returned from another tour. An essential trip to Poona had to be organized to put together a committee for the civil disobedience movement in Hyderabad. The Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, who ruled there, was trampling on the civil and religious rights of his Hindu subjects. The life of the Hindus there, always precarious, was now unendurable. Keshu turned to his door with leaden feet. He was ready to crash, to lose himself in Lakshmi's warm arms.

"*Arre* Keshu," called Mai.

"Yes, Mai?" asked Keshu, concerned.

"Can you please find Vishwas? It is getting late—he needs to go to bed."

"Don't worry, Mai, I'll send him over immediately."

Where could he be? Ah! On the roof watching Tatyarao, most likely! Sure enough, as he opened the door to the roof, Vishwas was right there peeking around the corner, keeping Savarkar in his sight. Neither Vishwas nor Keshu had turned any lights on. Well they knew Savarkar's dislike of being disturbed at this time.

"Vishwas!" Keshu whispered urgently.

Vishwas jumped visibly. "Keshurao! Er . . . er . . ."

Guilt was written all over his face.

"Come, it is your bedtime. Your mother is looking for you."

"I just wanted to be with my father. I haven't seen much of him, especially lately."

"Yes, it has been a very hectic time," Keshu said, quite gently.

They had been away for the Sind tour, followed by the Punjab and Delhi tours. Besides, Savarkar was unwell, with literally no voice in between—so many speeches did he deliver!

"But you know—your father does not like being disturbed here. We must leave."

"Who is there?" Savarkar had gotten wind of the whispers.

Vishwas quickly scuttled behind Keshu.

"It's me, Keshu, Tatyarao. I was checking to make sure all was okay with you."

"Vishwas?" Savarkar, walking toward them, had spied Vishwas. "Is there a problem?"

"No, Tatya, none!"

"Well, then I should like to be left alone, please."

Just then there was a clatter of footsteps and Gajanan was before them. "Tatyarao, Tatyasaheb Kelkar is here from Poona to meet you."

"At this hour? Without an appointment?"

It was Savarkar's firm rule to meet only by appointment. Of course, he had to relax it for unexpected HM work.

"His train got in late from Poona. He has to go back by the early train tomorrow to make all the arrangements for the assembly."

Savarkar took a deep breath. "Let us not keep him waiting then, Gajanan. Come!"

They left. Vishwas watched his father disappear wistfully. "Keshurao, he told us to leave him alone, yet see—he is meeting Tatyasaheb Kelkar!"

"Vishwas, your father's time is not his own. He is working so very hard for our country and people."

"I know, Keshurao. I *know*! He is wonderful. I am so proud to be his son really—but sometimes . . . sometimes . . . I want my father to be *just* my *father*!"

Moisture glistened in Vishwas's eyes. He sank down on the steps, hunching his shoulders. "I wish he would talk to me for hours—give me the benefit of his wonderful knowledge. I wish . . . I want . . . to bask in the warmth of his love . . ."

"Vishwas! Tatyarao loves you very much! Never doubt it."

"He loves me because I am his *son*—but does he love me because I am *me*?"

Keshu hugged Vishwas. He was totally at a loss. What could he say to a ten-year-old? "Don't talk so, Vishwas, things will change when we have our freedom. You will see!"

"Of course, Keshurao!" said Vishwas, straightening up abruptly. "It's only my tiredness talking."

A little later, Keshu lay in his bed, Lakshmi in his arms, but the much looked for sleep was elusive.

"What is it, Keshu?" Lakshmi asked, stroking his brow gently. "You seem more than just tired."

"I was talking to Vishwas, Lakshmi . . . . My heart went out to him . . ."

"Y-e-e-s," Lakshmi sighed. "He does miss his father's attention."

"But it can't be helped, Lakshmi! Tatyarao is stretching himself to the limit for our country. Single-handedly he is building up the Hindu Mahasabha to become a political force—in the Congress that role was played by Gokhale, Tilak, and Gandhi, one after the other! *And* he is fighting on all fronts, too—social, political, literature!"

"Yes, Keshu, he is doing a wonderful job of it! His success has the Congress media spewing vitriol against him all the time."

"Yes, *curse* them! That brings danger; so Tatyarao keeps his family away from his public life."

"Unfortunately, public life takes up all his time, so he has no time for his family!"

"But, Lakshmi, he does make sure they are well taken care of. He is kind and gentle to them."

"That's not enough, is it, Keshu? Not for them," said Lakshmi sadly. "Like the true Karmayogi he is, he has put emotions under lock and key and is marching along his chosen path of duty, making sacrifices. Therein lies his greatness! Only it is not just the great men who make sacrifices—their families do so too!"

"Hopefully, it all works out, Lakshmi. Mai will have to hold her family together."

"Y-e-e-s, she will, won't she?" said Lakshmi pensively.

"Tatyarao deserves happiness! Every day he faces the threat of being jailed on *any* pretext—you *know* how many times they have raided the homes of the Savarkar brothers, how the secret police dog their heels. Though he is prepared to face the worst, he worries about the fate of his family."

"Yes, Keshu, it is an unendurable way of living!" Lakshmi sat straight up, looking anxiously into Keshu's eyes. "We *will* get freedom, won't we, Keshu? And in free Hindustan, Tatyarao *will* be free of this sword hanging over his head, won't he?"

Keshu took Lakshmi's fingers to his lips, kissing them one by one. "Definitely, Lakshmi! Don't worry. Who will hound such a great patriot in *free* Hindustan? He will be able to relax his guard and breathe free air. Though his health is affected for ever, I am afraid."

"So, too, is Babarao's. He is suffering from another attack tonight. His head and legs, both are giving him much trouble."

Keshu jumped out of bed at that. "I must go and see to his comfort. Don't wait up for me," he called from the door.

Keshu knocked on Babarao's door and entered. Shantabai, Narayanrao's wife, was coming tiredly to the door.

"Keshurao!" she exclaimed.

"Shantabai, I have come to nurse Babarao. You go back to your rooms."

"Oh Keshurao! The children are asleep. I can take care of him. I always have."

"Shantabai, you are devoted to him, but you must let me do this. You need to rest. Your baby is due next month, and the little ones take up a lot of your energy. Narayanrao is away too"—she opened her mouth to argue—"no, no arguments. It's settled."

"No, Keshurao, no point in using that dictatorial tone with me. I have *never* shirked my duty."

Certainly that was true! She had nursed Babarao back from death's door when he was set free from jail, putting aside her own illness and the recommended bed rest! They could be here for *ever*, arguing; a ruse was called for.

"Do I hear Babarao calling?" exclaimed Keshu.

That was enough to cut Shantabai's protests. They hurried to Babarao's bed. Shantabai had tied his legs tightly with woolen bandages. This gave him some measure of comfort. Keshu sat

next to Babarao; picking up the small, flat, round stone by the pillow, he commenced giving him little blows on the head with it. Nothing else gave him any relief. It was almost dawn before Babarao's spasms died down and Keshu could leave him alone.

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Savarkar finished his lunch. He always ate all his meals alone when at home. He did not relish family chatter at mealtimes. He meditated for fifteen minutes and then went in search of his children. They were lying in wait for him too.

"Would you like to walk to the beach, Vishwas? Prabhat?"

"Beach!" both squealed in delight.

The beach was close by, and they went there often but not with their father.

"Can you spare the time, Tatya?" enquired Prabhat anxiously. She had a sweetness in her nature, though she was quite the chip off the old block when the mood was upon her.

Savarkar smiled. "Yes, Prabhe, I have made some time just for you, since it is Saturday. But let's hurry. Hopefully, we will not meet anyone who will accost us with conversation!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Vishwas, not much liking the idea of sharing this precious time with his father. "Why don't we just relax in our garden? It is nice and shady. The sun's too hot for the beach now."

"Yes, Tatya, it *is* rather hot and sunny," agreed Prabhat, anxiously eyeing her light-skinned arm. "I certainly don't want to get tanned!"

"I'll get Ashok and Vikram," said Vishwas. "The little ones are taking a nap."

The boys—Vishwas ten, Ashok eleven, and Vikram six—showed off some off their sporting achievements for Savarkar's approval. Prabhat, very much conscious of her budding womanhood—all thirteen years of it—walked by his side, *very* ladylike. Occasionally forgetting her dignity she

skipped and hopped, chattering gaily. There was a patter of running feet.

"I am coming too! I am coming too! Why did you leave me behind?"

"*Harsh!*" exclaimed Prabhat. "Does your mother know you are here?"

"Yes!" he lied defiantly.

Prabhat trained eagle, Savarkarian eyes on him, arms akimbo. "Really?"

Harsh, only three years old, squirmed. "We-e-ll, maybe not, then."

Savarkar laughed. "It is okay. Let him be. Ashok, run in and tell your mother he is here. But mind you, Harsh, no mischief! No disappearing out of the garden!" Savarkar warned.

"Yes, Tatya," said Harsh, a bit squashed.

"Okay, children, tell me—all is well at school?"

There was a sudden silence. "What is it? Are you having trouble? Do you need tutoring?" asked Savarkar, concerned.

"No, no, Tatya! It is nothing like that," exclaimed Prabhat.

"The teacher is cutting our marks and scolding us too!" complained Vishwas.

"Why is that?"

"Tatya, you insist that we must use the new revised script you devised and the new words in the purified language—but the teacher just gets angry when we do that. Yesterday, I got a rap on my hand for saying 'kramank' instead of 'number.'"

"This is very wrong! The education board has given me permission to use both the script and the words. Your teachers have not heard of it yet—maybe. Don't worry. I will write a note to your teacher and one to the board, too, to make sure they notify all the schools."

"But, Tatya, if the teacher is not convinced we will still get into trouble," cried Vishwas.

"Vishwas, son, doing the right thing is never easy." Savarkar's voice was quiet but firm. "The path of a reformer is strewn

with rocks. He cannot stumble or falter. If he has to walk alone, so be it; but he does *not* give up!"

"But, Tatya, the kids in my class make fun of me too."

"Vishwas, they do so in their ignorance. It is a human tendency to mock what one cannot understand. There will be a day when the script and the purified language will be commonplace. It is our duty to see to it that it becomes so."

"Oh we will, Tatya!" Prabhat nudged Vishwas. "Won't we, Vishwas?"

"Of course, Prabhatai! Aren't we the children of Veer Savarkar? We must live up to his reputation!"

"Okay, children, it is time for me to go in and work. Take care of Harsh now. He is quite the expert at giving the slip. Where is he?"

"Where *did* he go? He won't dare leave the garden, not after you expressly told him not to, Tatya."

"There he is! He has climbed up the *peru* tree!" cried Ashok, marveling at his little brother, who stood proudly on a branch five feet off the ground.

"*He Ram!* Ashok! Go, get him. Next he will let his hands free; that would be just like him!" cried Prabhat.

Everyone rushed to get Harsh down. As Savarkar walked inside, he could hear Prabhat scolding the unrepentant Harsh. "Just wait till I tell your mother of your escapade! Always up to something! She will be *very* upset with you and scold you too!"

"No way! Baba will not let her. He doesn't like it when she scolds us. So *there*!"

"You little . . . !"

"Ooohhh . . ."

Seeing that prudence was the better part of valor at this moment, Harsh took off inside as fast as his little legs could carry him.

Monday afternoon Shantabai dropped in on Mai. "O Mai, my husband is coming home this evening from his tour. I think it is a good idea for all of us to have dinner together."

"Oh dear!" Mai wrung her hands. "I don't think it is a good idea. *He* likes to eat alone at home."

"That's all very well, but it is good for the family to be together. I insist. You tell Tatya, okay?"

Mai looked most alarmed. "Shante, *no*! I can't. *He* will be most annoyed. You tell him."

"Really, Mai! What are you afraid of? Tatya never even raises his voice to you! Stand up to him a little. He appreciates boldness."

Mai shook her head. "I don't like to go against his wishes, Shante."

"Oh very well then! I'll send him a message."

Later, Lakshmi stopped by to help Shantabai in the kitchen.

"Lakshmi, how was your day at the clinic?" Shantabai asked.

Lakshmi worked at a nearby clinic as a nurse. "Much as usual, Shantabai. Today I got a recipe from one of the patients to cook a special dish for my husband. He had eaten it at the palace and loved it."

"How very interesting! I am cooking Tatya's favorite food today. We will all eat together; not often are all the brothers home at the same time!"

"Oh Shantabai!" said Lakshmi. "How much you care for the family—in your condition and with so many little ones to take care of too!"

"Mai didn't want to tell Tatya herself, so I sent a message through Gajanan."

"I am sure Tatyarao is very happy to dine with his brothers—they have a deep bond among them! But the years in Andaman have left an indelible mark on him."

"You know, Lakshmi, I don't think Mai has ever recovered from those years either."

Both brooded on this.

"For four years Tatya was away in London," continued Shantabai. "In that time she lost her little son Prabhakar. What

a torment that must have been! Then Tatya was sentenced for *fifty* years! *Very* shattering! The Government made her father forfeit his job and confiscated his property too. Everyone blamed Mai, you know, for her family's trouble. Her father took care of her, protected her, but you know how people *talk*, how *mean* they can be!"

"Yes, I definitely do know *that*!"

"Now she is so quiet and self-effacing, just a shell of herself. I can hardly believe she is the same woman who rode a horse to visit Tatya in jail!"

"Good heavens! How very gutsy of her and in 1910 too."

"She dotes on Tatya. All she wants is to make him happy—and yet something is not going well with their marriage." She sighed. "It is not easy being a wife of a great, extraordinary man! Poor Mai!"

"Well, all I can say is—Narayanrao is very lucky to have *you* as his wife."

Shantabai felt self-conscious. "Go on with you, Lakshmi! I am the lucky one. Do you know? I lost one little baby girl in 1917, then it was ten years before Ashok was born. I despaired of ever having kids! I can't tell you how many so-called well-wishers suggested to my husband that he marry again. Some even brought proposals to him . . . ! He politely but firmly told them off. One wife only for him! Any other man would have taken another wife, don't you think?"

Lakshmi was silent, eyes downcast. Shantabai clapped a hand to her forehead. "*He Ram*, how tactless . . . ! Forgive me, Lakshmi, for a moment it slipped my mind that you are childless."

"It's okay, Shantabai. I wish things were different, but I have no quarrel with my life."

"Yes, why should you? A blind man can see that Keshurao loves his wife very much!"

Lakshmi blushed. "Oh, Shantabai, I have heard of the great Shantabai-Narayanrao romance also!"—it was Shantabai's turn to blush now—"when people were afraid to even say the name

'Savarkar' you fell in love with Narayanrao and insisted on marrying him—*knowing* all the difficulties it would entail."

"Okay, okay, that's enough about me. Anyway, we are almost done. I'll get Chapala and Harsh from Prabhat and feed them now."

"Oh, do let me get them. I'll feed Chapala too. I love babies!"

Chapala was a cuddly little bundle, just a year old. She laughed and gurgled as Lakshmi fed her, playing baby games with each bite. Shantabai sat on a paat, rubbing her back as she supervised Harsh. "Thank you, Lakshmi. I do get tired sometimes. I am glad my sister will be here to help me when the baby comes!"

Later, at dinnertime, Shantabai had set the plates for all except herself.

"What is this, Vahini?" enquired Savarkar immediately. "Where is your plate?"

"I am fasting today, Tatya."

"What, fasting…!" Savarkar's views against any meaningless rituals were famous. "In your condition?"

"Tatya, you know fasting doesn't mean going hungry. I ate the permitted food during the day. Now I will keep you company with fruit."

"Oh, and if I were to put some food from my plate into yours, would that mean your fast is tainted? Gone to waste?" Savarkar asked mischievously.

"Oh no, Tatya," Shantabai replied calmly. "Go ahead, if it pleases you. Your food in my plate won't bother me in the least. I shall continue to eat."

"Hmm . . . that's sensible, at least."

"Tatya, if you don't like my fasts and rituals why did you ask to do the *puja* for me the other day?"

Mai's head shot up. Her husband—worshipping the idols of God! He was a firm disbeliever of such things and advocated against it. He *only* ever donned the *pitambar*, the ritual dhoti, for his social causes. Why—he had never accompanied *her*!

Savarkar's smile slowly faded away. "Vahini, you have no idea how much I hold you in esteem. You married Bal and took care of him when he was alone—we were so helpless in Andaman—*and* you devoted yourself to Yesuvahini, looked after her till death." Emotion he strove so hard to keep in check crept into his voice and moistened his eyes. "Babarao is here today with us, only thanks to your nursing . . ."

"Tatya! It is my dharma to do so. I must take care of my family."

Savarkar cleared his throat. "Don't minimize it, Vahini. I know its value. Not everyone can prevail upon adversity as you have. Doing puja for you was a token of my appreciation for taking care of our family so devotedly."

Perhaps . . . one day—he will do puja with me . . . ? One day . . . ? Mai was thinking with a pang. But she said not a word—just ate, head bent.

"*Arre* Tatya," Babarao diverted the conversation to a topic close to their hearts. "We must keep a sharp eye on Gandhi! He keeps pulling a fast one on us! As president of the Hindi literature society he has introduced the idea of replacing Hindi as the national language by its Urduised version, Hindustani, *and* giving the Arabic script the same national status as our Devnagari script!"—he clenched his fist—"he is positively undermining the Hindu culture in every way—over my dead body, I say! There is no end to his Muslim appeasement!"

"You did get the opposition to it passed in the committee, didn't you, Babarao?" asked Savarkar anxiously.

"Most certainly I did! I did not have any support, but the important thing is that the opposition is registered. Now I am campaigning to get the support. Don't worry—when it is time to vote, we will have the majority. I am working to get that meeting scheduled in Poona. Half the battle will be won with that!"

"Tatya," said Narayanrao, "the ban on your book, *My Transportation for Life,* is not lifted. Minister Kanhayyalal Munshi of Bombay Province declares that it incites the Indians to rebel!"

"*He Ram!*" exclaimed Shantabai hotly. "That book is nothing but the honest truth of the atrocities of the British jails! The Congress government is just afraid that Tatya will capture the hearts of the people and become a threat to the status of Gandhi. *Ooooh!* It makes me so *mad*! Don't forget—for the first three years the British government had not noticed this book. As soon as it was published in Gujarati, Gandhi's mother tongue, it came under government scrutiny and was promptly banned."

"I have no doubt, too," said Narayanrao, "that Tatya would still be in captivity had not the Congress ministers refused to take office!"

It was Barrister Jamnadas Mehta who had made Savarkar's release a condition—nicely twisting the government arm!—before accepting a post in the ministry in lieu of the Congress members.

"Well, anyway," said Savarkar, "I cannot emphasize enough that Hindus *must* vote for pro-Hindutva candidates. If they want to see a fair deal for the Hindus, their rights not trampled upon and waived away—that is *crucial*!"

From then on the conversation went on to politics.

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In Poona, the first meeting was held in the Kesari Hall where a Hyderabad Civil Disobedience Committee[74] was established. The president was Mr. G. V. Ketkar and the secretary, Mr. Nathuram Godse. The next meeting, at six o'clock in the evening, was at Shaniwar Wada.[75] Keshu's heart filled with emotion to be here again. What grace, what aura . . . ! All those years ago it was here that he had made the final decision to become a revolutionary. Twenty-five years later, freedom was still elusive—like a puff of smoke; grab

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74 Actual untranslated name Bhaganagar Nishastra Pratikar Mandal.

75 Palace fort built in 1736 by Bajirao I; the seat of the Peshwas till 1818.

at it as you may, there is nothing in hand. Oh freedom . . . ! He came out of his reverie. Savarkar was giving an inspiring speech: "Gentlemen, in a country ruled by a foreign power, no man can linger behind! Rise, each one of you; step forward to protest the injustices heaped upon your own in Hyderabad. Establish centers to promote this cause. This is a cause for all; do not let party politics and differences hold you back.

The Nizam has declared that Hyderabad is an Islamic State, despite the 85 percent Hindu majority, and is systematically working toward that goal. In Hyderabad, the rights of the Hindus are quashed: special severe laws applicable only to them; minimal representation for them in the government bodies, police, and army at all levels; lower pay scale; no freedom to practice their religion, build new temples and renovate old ones; restrictions on writing in their language, running schools, and holding conferences—all this is the norm. Permission for processions is given only to Muslims. The Maulvis and Muslim organizations, like the Khaksars, are encouraged to aggressively convert the Hindus, especially the depressed classes. Rioting and harassing by the ruffians and raping Hindu women are bywords.

Senapati Bapat has led one team of protesters to Hyderabad and was hustled out of there. Mr. Modhak and Mr. Date secretly toured the Hyderabad state. We have heard today their eyewitness account of the terrible situation there. Hindus in the Nizam's rule *cannot* be treated like slaves!"

Later, a community dinner was arranged in a nearby hall; everyone trooped there. Senapati Bapat contrived to have a few minutes alone with Keshu.

"Keshurao, did Barrister have anything to say about my letter in the papers? About my comments on 'Hindu Raj'?"

Keshu eyed him silently. Pandurang Bapat, a slight, short man with big, bushy mustaches and black-rimmed, round glasses, had been a key member of Savarkar's Abhinav Bharat. Today he was a member of the Congress, though he followed the politics of his ideals only. He was sincerely dedicated to the cause of the poor and the downtrodden and had earned from the public the honorary title of "Senapati"—General—for his

organized protest in support of the poor farmers who lost their land in the Mulshi Dam project.

"Senapati, do you mean the one you wrote, in protest of Tatyarao, after the Hindu-Muslim unity rally that you led holding the Muslim flag?" Keshu asked sharply. "Tatyarao is not one to hold grudges! I, however, am not so forgiving. He is nearly killing himself trying to save our country; detractors are berating him in public and press. Is it necessary that friends like you should join that game? *Tcha!*"

"Tell me, what is the difference between Barrister's demand for establishing 'Hindu Raj' and Jinnah's for establishing Pakistan?" Bapat retorted.

"Jinnah wants to gouge pieces out of *our* Hindustan to establish a Pakistan with Muslim rule. Tatyarao wants to preserve the integrity of our Hindustan. That the Hindu nation exists in Hindustan is an inescapable fact! Tatyarao is *not* asking for 'Hindu *Rule*'! His concept of free Hindustan is truly democratic with equal rights for every man—no special concessions for *anyone*. 'Hindu *Raj*' is *your* way of putting it, likening the Hindu nation to an ambitious, imperialistic State like the 'British *Raj*.'"

"That may be true, but what about the Indian Muslims?" challenged Bapat.

"What about them, Senapati? They will be citizens just like the rest of us and practice their religion with just as much freedom as we will practice ours!"

"What! No Hindu-Muslim unity!"

"You know, Senapati, you see a threat in the concept of 'Hindu nation' where there is none and utterly fail to grasp the bogey that is this 'Hindu-Muslim' unity! What more is it than a ploy—for the British to avoid giving India freedom, for the Muslims to make unreasonable demands, and for Gandhi . . . . I fail to see *why* he is beating this drum!" Keshu was getting quite agitated.

"Barrister himself was promoting this Hindu-Muslim unity in his book, *The Indian War of Independence*! He makes a big

deal about the way Hindus and Muslims have come together for a common cause. The book has inspired so many to become freedom fighters—and now he has changed his mind!"

Keshu took a deep, calming breath. To speak heatedly was to minimize the import of his words. If Senapati could not understand Tatyarao's words, could he expect him to understand his?

"Senapati," he said, the desired calm quite, quite missing, "it is not Tatyarao who has changed but the circumstances! In the War of 1857 the Hindus and Muslims were united in one cause—getting rid of the enemy, the British. Today this common cause doesn't exist! The Muslim leaders are openly avowing loyalty to the British. Jinnah has declared that he will be happy to serve under the British Raj into endless future! *Where* is their desire of freedom for Hindustan? In the event that the British grant freedom to us, Jinnah wants to chop our motherland and create a Pakistan!"

"Yes, that is so, but we should give Mahatmaji's experiment a chance, don't you think?"

"Just how many years should we continue to give it a chance?" cried Keshu. "Until Hindustan is torn asunder? Even at the time when Gandhi introduced this unity concept to the freedom movement and supported the Khilafat cause to promote it—Ali Mussliyar, the leader of the Moplahs, declared that he would be happy to live in a United India *after* every Hindu was converted to Islam! *Tcha!* And you want to wait for unity! Eighteen years is long enough, Senapati!"

"Well, they have a right to worry about being abused in a country of Hindu majority."

"Wherefrom does this fear come? They are hardly a downtrodden community! When and where in history have the Muslims suffered an injustice in India? And the British are positively catering to their demands! Far from fearing abuse, they fear the loss of their *'special'* status in an equal society."

"Still, Mahatmaji is a saint—he should be above criticism, don't you think?" Bapat's hackles were rising too.

"What! Should *any* man be above that? Make him a saint and then hide all his weaknesses and foibles to maintain that fiction? *Tcha!* Where the criticism is true, and not fabrication, it must be aired in a free and just society! Wasn't it you who declared that Gandhi is as much 'saint' as 'businessman'? It was also you who advised the Indians against falling for the 'cult' of an individual. For getting so enamored with any person—you named Gandhi—that they cannot see clearly."

"My criticisms are gentle. Barrister is like a volcano!"

"There is pressing need for just such a volcano, Senapati!"

Ignoring that, Bapat said, "I don't think criticizing Mahatmaji serves any purpose. Single-handedly he has made the whole country pant for freedom—and now the people might lose faith in him. Is that any way to repay him?"

"Senapati, the motto of "Truth above All" that Gandhi loves to tout—is he himself to be above that?" Keshu was utterly fed up. "Talking of getting freedom for India is easy—where are the deeds? The agenda? The goals? You criticized his 'Salt March' as quite a useless and ineffective way of getting freedom. Good heavens, resulting from the pact he made with Irwin after it, he got only an *appearance* of concessions—even the salt tax that he had protested against was not abolished or reduced; nor did he actually *make* the demand of independence to the Viceroy! And yet you talk of staying in abeyance while he endlessly experiments with us and our motherland?"

Suddenly Savarkar was before them. He had spotted their heated discussion. "Senapati, why are you jumping into the fire by questioning Keshu? Save your suicide for your noble causes!"

Savarkar was smiling. Bapat was planning on embracing *jalsamadhi*—a voluntary death by drowning—in the Mutha River, for the cause of India's freedom.

"Ask *me* any questions that you may have, not Keshu. He is my staunchest supporter and very protective too"—Savarkar patted Keshu's hand—"that's why I have him as my bodyguard,

and of course, because two of you or me put together is not enough to make one Keshu!"

Bapat, jovial by nature, laughed. "Barrister, we need less talk and more food right now, perhaps."

"Dinner is being served. Let us go. You, too, Keshu."

After the last meeting, Bapat was in the car that drove them to the Shivaji Nagar station. Silence reigned. Keshu still smoldered. The Congress media battered Tatyarao, called him communal, anti-Muslim, and made it a regular business to malign him—*that* one swallowed, somehow. Congress High Command was bound to do it, to protect their clout over the people, to keep themselves in power. Tatyarao threatened all of that and their future aspirations. But that Bapat, who had known Tatyarao so closely, should doubt and misunderstand him . . . ! And then discuss it with him, Keshu, too!

They were passing over the Lakdi Pul,[76] which spanned the Mutha River. Savarkar grabbed the opportunity to diffuse tension.

"Gajanan," he exclaimed in the silence, startling everyone, "quick, you hold on tight to Senapati here, and I'll grab Keshu—lest he pushes the Senapati into the river, hastening him to his jalsamadhi!"

Gajanan and Bapat burst out laughing. Keshu teetered on the brink, but his sense of humor got the better of him, and he too burst out in a guffaw. "Tatyarao, I can—*maybe*—see myself shoving Senapati in the river. But to picture anyone of your delicate frame and size grabbing and holding *me* . . . ! *That* defies the imagination."

There was more laughter still.

* * *

Savarkar sat on his divan deep in a pile of correspondence. Seated one leg crossed over the other, dressed in his usual

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76 One of the old, wood bridges in Poona.

crisp, white shirt and dhoti—the inevitable cap and coat near at hand—he was totally engrossed, his pen scratching swiftly over the paper. Gajanan was next to him, quickly perusing letters and bringing important ones to his notice. They had just returned from another long but successful tour. Now they had a few days' respite from tours until the end of December. All this travel and nonstop work was taking a terrible toll on Savarkar's health and digestion. Taking a moment's break, Savarkar stretched his back to ease the muscles.

Gajanan held out one letter. "Tatyarao, this one is from Kamalabai Potdar. Her husband is fasting as a protest against the injustices done to Hindus in Nandgaon. She begs you most fervently to stop his fast and pick up the cause yourself."

Savarkar took a deep breath. The Muslims harassed them by a myriad of pinpricks; they carried on objecting to Hindu processions and music—an essential part of Indian celebrations—or harassed the Hindus by killing cows, so sacred to them. Raping and converting of Hindu women was commonplace, from historical times. That the Provincial Congress government favored the Muslims was an added aggravation.

In his last tour, his lawful procession, provided with proper permits, was blocked by Muslim ruffians threatening violence. The local police were quick to arrive. But what do you know? They took position between the two parties—the armed Muslim ruffians safely protected behind them, their rifles trained on the Hindu procession . . . ! He had argued that the lawbreakers should be disarmed and apprehended. *That* was not possible, the police countered—offending the Muslims was a no-no by the Congress local government Muslim-appeasement policy! The police insisted that to avoid an outbreak of violence, the Hindus, though in the right, would have to back down. They had asked him to get off the car. He had done so, calling off the procession to avoid mayhem injuring innocent lives. Even so, the police had beaten his people in their haste to open a path for him to leave. Violence

perpetrated upon the Hindus was permissible, apparently! It was *outrageous*!

Such incidents were the norm rather than the exception. The incident in Nandgaon was one in a list of many.

"Gajanan, is there never any end to this injustice inflicted upon the Hindus? How can I stretch myself and fight every battle, every injustice personally?"

After a moment's reflection, he added, "Draft a letter telling her that I hold out no false hope of my personal help. But it is unacceptable that her husband should be the sole protester! Are the rest of the Hindus there to go about their usual business? No! That must change. She must contact the nearest HM office and present this letter. Representatives should contact the other Hindu organizations there. A deputation should also be sent to appeal to the Maharaja of Gwalior. I am confident that he will come to their aid."

Both resumed their work.

"Tatyarao, here is one from Dharmaveer Davre. He is offering to help in the Hyderabad cause."

"We must send him a letter of thanks and encouragement, Gajanan."

"But, Tatyarao, he so strongly opposed you, just the other day, for your policy allowing the ex-untouchables entrance into public places! Why accept his help now?"

"Gajanan, the Hyderabad issue is universal. In fact, all my issues are so. I have no right to lay down the condition that people must acquiesce with me in all things before they offer help!" He laughed. "Who will I be left with if I do *that*? Just my family and a few of you intimates!"

"Yes, that is so true, Tatyarao."

"Okay, shall we focus on correspondence with the HM leaders in various towns now? They must work hard to consolidate the HM, to make sure it takes firm root. My tours are meaningless if there is no strong and diligent backup work. HM candidates must compete in all elections. It is most essential to secure representation in the Government."

Gajanan rustled the papers. "Er . . . Tatyarao."

"Yes, Gajanan?"

"The Congress is touting the untruth everywhere that you are a friend of the British, since you support the federation and advocate taking office."

"People have to be very gullible indeed to believe that fairy tale! The Mahatma and Nehru are on visiting terms with the Viceroy *and* many other British dignitaries, even in London. So many Congress members are socializing with the British officials—I *know* this for a fact—and *I* am their friend . . . ! It is laughable. I don't have the time and energy to answer every ridiculous accusation they make."

"It is so unfair! Their reach is so far, they have so many newspapers in their pocket and apparently not many scruples!"

"That is the name of the game of politics and power—and Congress and its High Command is all about that! Let us finish these letters; then I want you to make sure we have all my speeches and write-ups organized to send to Jugalkishore Birla. The Birlas are big shots and have international reach. Jugalkishore is doing a great job of publicizing my word in other countries. We cannot have enough of that!"

In the afternoon, Savarkar sought out Babarao. He was busy writing at his desk; he wrote well-researched books on Hindu nationalism, despite his busy schedule.

"Tatya!" said Babarao, putting his pencil down as Savarkar entered. "Come, sit here. Sometimes it is hard to believe we live in the same building; I see so little of you!"

"Yes, Baba, there will be no resting until Hindustan is saved," said Savarkar, settling on the bed. "I want to touch base with you."

"I heard that the students in Hyderabad are taking a bold stand and singing the *Vande Mataram* in its entirety in the University," said Babarao, eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"They are being very brave, not backing off on the threat of expulsion, either. Eight hundred and fifty students have been kicked out of the University for this 'offense.'"

"I admire these students—but their education, Tatya!"

"Nanarao Kedar of Nagpur has transferred and absorbed all of them into his University."

"Oh, that is a relief! What about the rest of the work?"

"Centers have been opened all over. The leaders are working hard in the propaganda. Volunteers are secretly infiltrating the State and preparing the people for the movement. They are also giving them backing in withstanding the ruffians' harassment, especially in the remote villages. I have had talks with the Sikh organizations, and they are going to give their support as well."

"Oh, that is very good news! Don't slacken on the correspondence in holding them all together. It doesn't take much to split parties! Congress is a great mischief-maker. I wouldn't put anything past it."

"Nathuram made an application to change the fund committee name to 'Hyderabad *Satyagraha* Committee'—catering to the Congress, I suppose. I had no objection since our protest is to be an unarmed civil disobedience one, but the name must read, 'Hyderabad *Hindu* Satyagraha Committee,' and so I told him!"

"Hmm! Is he under the impression that Congress is *with* us in this protest?"

"That's what I suspected, and so I have disabused him of the idea. Gandhi called all the Hyderabad State Congress leaders to Wardha to bring a peremptory halt to their participation—the Nizam cannot be offended, he said, he is an Indian ruler, so whatever the injustice he heaps upon the Hindus, they must suffer in silence!"

"Is there no limit to this man's effrontery? And why is Congress offending the Hindu Princes, then? They are Indian rulers too."

"He is the 'Mahatma'!" said Savarkar ironically. "Anyway, he has allowed their members to participate on a personal level only. Some of them entertain the hope of getting more votes in the elections by going to jail for the Hyderabad cause. What a people!"

"Don't let Congress members control the committee, Tatya! They are not above sabotaging the project; they obey their High Command implicitly. Gandhi is a traitor to India! Don't ever forget the Gandhi-Muslim conspiracy."

"Indeed, how can I, Baba? But at the moment he has his hands full trying to keep his power within the Congress . . . !"

Subhash Chandra Bose, the current young and dynamic President of the Congress was extremely popular—both, with the people and Congress members. He had been making speeches inciting people for action—violent if need be—toward total independence. The other day at a Congress meeting they had to get the police. Passions were running so high that delegates of the opposite camps were threatening violence to each other; a far cry from the vow of nonviolence they had taken!

Babarao laughed, slapping his thigh. "Yes, Gandhi is livid. Anarchy in the Congress fold! The dictator may count his days. Subhash is contesting to be president again!"

"Don't count your chickens, Baba! Gandhi, Nehru, and Sardar Patel are busy trying to bring about Subhash's downfall. Gandhi's machinations have a way of being *very* successful! How ruthlessly he masterminded the downfall of Dr. Khare, the Premier Minister of the Central Provincial government!"

Dr. Khare, disobeying Gandhi, had dismissed his unruly ministers and appointed new ones—one of whom was an ex-untouchable! *That* upset Gandhi very much. Khare declared to Gandhi that he would, in his capacity as premier, do what he thought was best. He even gave licenses for rifle classes, much to Gandhi's horror. So the Congress bigwigs tried forcing Khare to sign a humiliating and incriminating resignation letter drafted by Gandhi. He refused—but they still managed to kick him out somehow.

"Yes, Tatya! You know, Khare told me, that Gandhi was against making an ex-untouchable a minister—he thought it would give the ex-untouchables inflated ideas of their

status! So much for Gandhi's 'Love the Harijans' mantra. Love them but do not give them any status or opportunities, apparently!"

"That's such a pity, Baba. Rehabilitation of the ex-untouchables should *not* be reduced to a mere propaganda." Savarkar shook his head regretfully.

"It's a pity too that Subhash and Sardar were major players in the Khare episode—see, now Subhash is in the same boat himself!"

"Anyone who goes against Gandhi's wishes is promptly thrown out of the Congress—it is inevitable! Gandhi has publicly declared that anyone who does not believe in the fundamental policy of Congress—read Gandhi—should leave and work outside it!"

"I shall pray for Subhash's victory! At least our country shall be free of Gandhism and freedom will be that much closer!" declared Babarao.

"Yes, Subhash has been demanding total independence for years—Gandhi has checkmated him every time. He has a concrete plan of giving an ultimatum to the British too. *But*—while many points in his agenda for freedom are agreeable to us, he has openly declared Hindutva as communal," cautioned Savarkar.

"We work with him on the freedom plan and make sure the rights of the Hindus are not sacrificed, then." Babarao checked his watch. "Oh well, let us wait and see! The older kids must be home from school now. I am going to take them all, even little Chapala, to the beach. Baby Nima is only a few weeks old—it will give Vahini a break."

The little troop headed for the beach. Just as they were about to turn into the beach lane, they heard shouts: "Babarao! Babarao!"

They stopped, surprised. Two figures were coming toward them practically at a run.

"Mohite! Namaskar," said Babarao.

"Ah . . . Babarao . . . ah . . . namaskar!"

Mohite, of a plump figure, was somewhat out of breath with the short sprint. "We just missed you at the house. My friend here, Kambli, wanted to speak to you."

"Well, let us get to the beach first, shall we? The children can play as we talk."

At the beach, Babarao warned the children to stay close and away from the water. The currents didn't make it safe to go in.

"Babarao," said Ashok, "we will build Shivaji's fort!"

Babarao beamed. "That's my boy! Go for it."

The older boys scavenged for some coconut shells to dig with. Prabhat watched over the little ones; no easy job, what with the twinkle-toed Harsh and the 'I love to eat sand' Chapala! Babarao settled down on a rock outcropping as the kids began the serious work of building a fort.

"Now, Kambli, what is it you want to talk about?"

Kambli was obviously a Congress member—wearing khadi and sporting the oval cap popularly known as the 'Gandhi topi,' a Congress member uniform.

"Well, Babarao . . . well . . . ," he said, smoothing his clipped mustache nervously. Unlike Tatyarao, who was soft-spoken and in control, Babarao was known to be excitable. His grip on the stick looked a little ominous—not, of course, that there was ever a time when he had used it on anyone. But he wouldn't like today to be the first time! How stern Babarao looked; those sharp, deep-set eyes and thick eyebrows—quite ferocious!

Babarao banged his stick in the sand. "Kambli! We don't have all day! Get on with it!"

Kambli came to with a start. "Babarao . . . I don't think it behooves you to call the Mahatma a traitor."

Babarao's eyebrows snapped together; a wave of anger rushed to his head. He strove to master it. It wasn't the first time anyone had said this to him, and it won't be the last! Kambli stepped back two paces.

"I don't say it without proof, Kambli! You have read Karandikar's articles on the Gandhi-Muslim conspiracy?"

"Yes, yes I have."

"Oh, you are a doubter then, are you?"

Babarao jumped up, groped in his jacket pocket, and whipped out a piece of paper. "Here, read this. I keep it in my pocket just for people like you. You will at least believe the evidence of your eyes, won't you?"

"We-e-ell," Kambli opened his mouth to argue.

Babarao rustled the paper impatiently. Prudently, Kambli took it. That paper was a cutout of an article written by Swami Shraddhananda, a religious Hindu leader. In the months before he was murdered, he had written a spate of articles exposing the shenanigans of Congress. One of the articles was particularly noteworthy. The Swami had met Maulana Mohammad Ali, leader of the Khilafat Movement, Gandhi's bosom buddy. Mohammad Ali mentioned to him a plan they had been hatching to get King Amanullah of Afghanistan to invade India and overthrow the British. That the Muslim hordes from the north should subjugate Hindustan would be the *very* worst fate. The Swami was horrified, but there was more. As proof, Mohammad Ali showed him a draft of the telegram that had been sent to the King. To the Swami's horror, he recognized the writing to be the distinctive writing of Gandhi . . . !

Mahatma of the Indians secretly betraying India to the age-old enemy, Afghanistan . . . ! The Mahatma, who swore against secrecy, publicly reviled the revolutionaries for their secret operations, himself plotting and scheming, *not* for the freedom of his country, but to deliver her into more monstrous hands than the British . . . !

Swami Shraddhananda saw fit to publicize this atrocity in an article.

"Ye-e-s," Kambli was saying, still looking at the paper, "indeed, I have to believe my eyes"—he looked up straight into Babarao's eyes—"even so, you are unwise to say such things about the Mahatma. He is the uncrowned King of India. Are you not afraid of being entrapped and thrown into jail, of being sent to the gallows?"

Babarao laughed sarcastically. "I have been down that road with the British—and without fear. All the might of the British didn't divert me from my cause, from truth and justice—you think fear of the Mahatma will do the trick? *Ha!*"

This squashed Kambli; he and Mohite took their leave. Babarao took a deep breath to calm himself. The kids were getting a bit tired too.

"Who wants to hear the stories of our great kings?"

"Me!" cried everyone.

Little Chapala climbed on to his lap. His pristine clothes were all sandy now, but he didn't mind. They spent a pleasant hour. The kids listened raptly. Babarao always had wonderful stories and never tired of recounting them. Stern taskmaster he undoubtedly was; everything had to be just so! But when it came to kids his heart was mush.

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The day before Savarkar was to leave on his tour, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh,[77] visited Savarkar Sadan. Savarkar was deeply involved working with HM members, wrapping up loose ends before he left on tour. Doctorji, as he was fondly known, had abiding love and respect for the Savarkar brothers.

"Doctor! It is wonderful to see you!" exclaimed Babarao warmly. "Does Tatya know you are here? Bal is at the dispensary, of course."

"Namaskar, Babarao!" said Doctorji. "Tatyarao is busy. I have not chosen my moment well."

"Better than you think. Tomorrow you wouldn't find him here at all. Come, let us have a heart-to-heart talk."

Babarao patted the chair next to him. He looked proudly upon this much-beloved tall, broad figure with the white bushy

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77 Literal meaning: National Volunteers' Organization; a voluntary Hindu organization founded in 1925 with Hindu consolidation as its aim.

mustaches and the tuft of white hair peeking from his tall, black cap. What a devoted patriot he was—the stuff great men are made of! Dissatisfied with the revolutionary path of his younger days, he had conceived the idea of consolidating the Hindus, instilling in them discipline and national character to withstand foreign subjugation. Down-to-earth and clear-headed, he knew just *how* to get to his goal—and so the RSS was born! He was ridiculed by many but persevered, merging his identity with that of the RSS. He had now inspired hundreds of young men to sacrifice their personal lives for the cause of their motherland. *No one*, not even his worst ideological enemies, ever doubted Doctorji's integrity.

"Doctor, namaskar!" Savarkar was before them. "I had to hear from others of your presence."

"Tatyarao, I know you are very busy."

"Not too busy to meet you! I hear the RSS is growing. That's very good!"

"We have a strong hold in Maharashtra and Punjab. In many places the Government is harassing us; they suspect us of building secret armies!"

"Even so, you have succeeded very well in your goal of consolidating the Hindus by keeping a low profile."

"Yes. Definitely RSS is *not* political! No matter what the political atmosphere, RSS should survive and carry on its work. All Hindus are one—*no* caste distinctions. Volunteers are welcome from all walks of life. I tell the Congress members, if they can give up their life and routine to rot in jail, can they not interrupt it for the benefit of their culture, their people? Go to remote places and spread the organization? Students can join institutions away from home and work for RSS at the same time. This is how we will bind the country together."

"Tatya, Doctor wanted you to lead the RSS. He shed tears when the Government refused permission to release you!" said Babarao.

"Doctor, I wouldn't suit the role of the RSS leader. Low-profile, unobtrusive—that is just not my character . . . !" Savarkar laughed.

"Oh yes, Doctor, Tatya is just like a ferocious storm."

"Ah, but one can change one's character for a mission," put in Doctorji. "Look at me. I used to be so short tempered. People were afraid of me. I have mellowed—I had to. I could not have put together one *shakha*, one group, otherwise."

Indeed, his face had great calm in repose now.

"If my mission were the same as yours, perhaps I might change," replied Savarkar. "But it is not! I want to *shake* the Hindus into awareness of the atrocities in our society. *Everyone,* man, woman, *and* child, should get rid of the birth-based caste system! It is not enough to love the ex-untouchables! They must be accepted as equals. They must be rehabilitated. And yes, I *cannot* leave politics alone, for it will only take one powerful and crooked politician to sell out our country! Being the President of Hindu Mahasabha suits my goal—Hinduization of politics and militarization of Hindudom—perfectly. *That* is what our Mother needs; for her I will work till I drop!"

"Tatyarao," said Doctorji, "sometimes I think my days of dropping are approaching!"

"What are you saying, Doctor?" cried Babarao.

"My health is not always so good, Babarao."

"I don't want to hear any such thing. If an old crock like me is hanging on, you, ten years my junior, can certainly do so! *I* shall be the first to go."

"I am afraid it is I who will have to go," said Savarkar. "To work, I mean," he added as the others gave him startled looks.

Later in the afternoon, Savarkar was alone catching up on last-minute paperwork. Prabhat peeped into the room.

"Tatya, may I come in?" she asked softly.

Savarkar looked up. "Come in, Prabhe. Is anything wrong?"

"No, Tatya, but tomorrow you are going away. I thought perhaps I can have you to myself for a little while. Though we didn't see you much, it was nice to know you were here. I will miss you so."

"I will be back soon. Now tell me, was that you I heard singing so melodiously?" Savarkar asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"No! Tatya, you know it wasn't me! My voice is not *that* good; no one's is."

"*I* think your voice is very good indeed!"

Prabhat gave him a quick hug. "Oh thank you, Tatya, but that was Lata, Mai Mangeshkar's daughter, you know. She sings like a nightingale, and she is only nine!"

"Her voice did have remarkable talent. She will go far. Did you say Mai Mangeshkar was here?" asked Savarkar interestedly.

"Aha! Now I have your full attention! You want to know if she brought fish for you?"

Savarkar loved to eat fish, and it was not cooked in his house. He gently tugged her braid. "Yes, you imp, I do."

"She did, to make sure you had fish on your last day here."

"She takes *such* good care of me!"

"Okay, Tatya, I have taken enough of your time. Vishwas and I are going to pack your bag now."

At the door she stopped. "By the way, we still get into trouble at school over the purified language! But I tell the teacher—my Tatya says we must persevere, so we will! That's that!" And she slipped out of the room.

Savarkar smiled. A rush of emotion went to his heart and moistened his eyes. After a moment he got back to work determinedly.

Chapter Twelve

1939

The Hyderabad Movement had a terrific response and was in full swing. Hindus from all walks of life had consolidated. Organized groups of volunteers systematically entered the State at predetermined intervals. They were immediately captured and thrown in jail. Somewhat alarmed at the strength of this movement, Sir Akbar Hyderi, the Nizam's Chief Minister, had made overtures making vague promises of improvement, conditional to the movement being called off. Naturally, Savarkar did no such thing. Their mere word was hardly to be relied on! He had sent several politely worded missives to the Nizam, seeking to resolve the issue amicably, making it clear that the movement was *not* out to destroy his rule but only to get just civil and religious rights for the Hindus.

The Nizam remained adamant. He declared that the protesters should not confuse his rule with that of the British. In his State they would not get the soft treatment the British gave to Gandhi's satyagrahis. So they were warned!

Nevertheless, the movement rolled on, gathering momentum.

June 1: Savarkar walked into Babarao's room in the evening. "Baba!" he called out.

"Tatya! Come in. Did you get a minute to yourself?"

"I have one last appointment in a few minutes, then the meeting of the Hyderabad Committee."

"Everything is on schedule?"

"Yes—now! Gandhi tried his hand at sabotaging the movement."

Babarao made an angry swipe. "We were expecting some such move on his part—what did he do?"

"He told the Arya Samaj chiefs to call off the movement"—Arya Samaj was the backbone of this movement, so such a move would have crippled it—"*and* he met Dr. Moonje in Delhi and told him to give me a message to do the same!"

"The . . . the . . . ." Babarao sputtered, finding no words to express his opinion of Gandhi. "Does he imagine his word is law everywhere? Are we his Congress puppets! Must we coddle the Muslims like he does?"

"I have spoken to the Arya Samaj chiefs and convinced them not to back off. Fortunately, in his vanity, Gandhi sent a message to me and I could control the damage!"

"Gandhi is suffering a loss of prestige at the debacle in Rajkot, you know."

"Yes, indeed! His 'fast unto death' to force the Thakore of Rajkot to abide by his promise, made to the Congress, came to a swift end!" Savarkar laughed suddenly. "Can you imagine Gandhi's horror when the Thakore welcomed his death in his State? He said *that* will surely put Rajkot on the map! They would build a beautiful memorial for the Mahatma, and people would flock there year after year!"

Babarao joined in the laughter. "Somebody needed to show him! He uses his 'fasts unto death' as a blackmailing tool! Do you know what advice he gave to a couple who went on a similar fast?"

"Yes, Baba?"

"Well, he said, and I quote: 'Tell them their fast has no moral basis. If people fasted against wrongs, fancied or real, and there was any yielding on account of such a fast, society would be disrupted.'"

"Such words from the man who practically has made fasting to get his way an institution . . . ! Baba, does he not count himself amongst 'people'?" Savarkar exclaimed. "Hindus

have made him God, and perhaps he has come to believe it too! Very typical of him, though; does he *ever* practice what he preaches?"

"He is used to getting his way, Tatya! Look how he recently overturned Dr. Lohia's bold amendment to his resolution for South Africa, *after* it was passed by the Congress Working Committee, and he is not even a member of Congress anymore!"

Dr. Lohia had changed Gandhi's words 'British Indians' from the resolution to 'Indians' and recommended that the Indians in South Africa should align themselves with the locals fighting for their freedom rather than their oppressors, the British.

"Gandhi wasn't going to stomach that amendment for a second, Baba! His whole satyagraha in Africa was to get the British to accept Indians as citizens. *We* know of his low opinion of the African locals! He scored another victory in ousting Subhash too, *despite* the fact Subhash won the elections and became president of the Congress . . . !"

"A real pity that is . . .," said Babarao, shaking his head sadly. "You know, Tatya, Subhash publicly said that he suffered from a 'mysterious' illness when he left Gandhi's ashram in Wardha. Is he insinuating something?"

"I don't know, Baba," Savarkar replied slowly, "but it certainly was very convenient for the bigwigs in Congress who wanted him out."

Subhash Chandra Bose, the newly elected popular president of the Congress, was unable to attend the scheduled Congress Working Committee meeting on account of a most unexpected illness he had picked up, returning from a visit to Gandhi's ashram in Wardha. Even though he explained the reason, the members--right on cue using it as an excuse—resigned en masse! He was left with only himself and his uncle on the committee. His resignation was inevitable after that.

"Subhash's good works are at an end now. Gandhi disbanded his National Planning Committee—the one that was

preparing plans for the industrialization of India. He is against industrialization, though funding for Congress comes from the industrialists primarily!"

"It is the same double standards, as always. There is no chance of Subhash's ultimatum to the British coming to pass, either; that's definitely out!" said Savarkar regretfully.

"Tatya, why do you think everyone can't see what we see so clearly?"

"What can I say, Baba; what can I say?" said Savarkar, making a helpless, questioning gesture with his hands. "Anyway, I definitely promote industrialization. We must use modern technology to progress!"

"You must be very happy with Seth Gulabchand Doshi, your staunch supporter! The Doshi family members are prominent industrialists."

"Yes, oh yes, we need more families like them! I must leave now."

* * *

Savarkar, Jamnadas Mehta, Nathuram Godse, S. R.—Mamarao—Date, Vishwasrao Davre, Tatyasaheb Kelkar, and Gajanan settled in Savarkar's office.

"Let us first recap the situation as it is. Mehtaji, will you take the lead?"

"Yes, Barrister. First of all, all the Congress Provincial governments have hit us with Section 144—no more assemblies are allowed. Centers of our movement are being forcibly shut down. Furthermore, Gandhi and Hyderi met with the Viceroy to pressure him into putting a stop to our movement. Hyderi wants to bring Hyderabad under the 'Protection of Princes' law, which forbids the people from making protests. The Viceroy said that such a law cannot be activated in only one State; it would have to be applied universally to all the States. Whereupon Gandhi declared he will call a halt to all the Congress protests in other States!"

There was a chorus of boos from everyone. Mehtaji raised his hand. "Gandhi is determined to foil our movement—however, he is not successful. Our people are defying the law. Centers remain open; assemblies are being held. Tatyasaheb Kelkar shall tell us more about the enrollment."

There was another chorus—"hail to the Hindu Dharma!" this time.

"Enrollment is tremendous," said Kelkar. "We should be able to sustain this movement for another year, if need be. Youngsters are raring to join the movement. Many are going through a civil disobedience at home first! Several, if they can get away with it, are lying about their age to clear the minimum-age hurdle. Our volunteers working secretly in Hyderabad have done a very good job. Several locals are coming out of the State and falsifying their names to enroll, to prevent the Nizam from penalizing their family. We have one large Arya Samaj group, the sixth one, ready to enter the State from the north on June 6, and our group, led by Mamarao, shall enter on the seventh."

"I have several assemblies and talks arranged prior to that on the fourth, fifth, and sixth," said Savarkar. "Are all the permits in place, Nathuram?"

"Tatyarao," said Nathuram, "the Government came down heavily under Section 144, but our people put up a fight. What irony—to fight for the rights of the Hindus in Hyderabad, we have to fight for our rights here first! The authorities sought to reach a compromise and said we could take out a procession without our small weapons, swords, and lathis. This was unacceptable. I have just heard that the authorities have finally given in unconditionally." This was very good news!

"We are seeing the results of our consolidation. We have to be united just like this in the freedom struggle!" said Savarkar proudly. "What about the treatment of the protesters in jail?"

"Tatyarao," said Nathuram, "the Nizam is under a lot of pressure! His jails are just not equipped to handle so many prisoners. In Aurangabad they have to use the neighboring stable as a prison! The whole fabric of their structure threatens

to be undone—there is more demand for flour mills to grind grain, tailors to stitch prison clothes, water, and food. Not to mention that it is becoming difficult for the authorities to take the protesters to and fro from the prison for their trials. The Nizam's courts can hardly handle the onslaught of these cases!"

"Yes, there is pressure, indeed!"

After everyone had left, Keshu came in for a talk. "Tatyarao . . ."

"Yes, Keshu?"

"Gajanan is going with the group on the seventh, but I have decided not to."

Savarkar said not a word.

"Much though I would like to give my personal support to this cause, I will not leave you alone and unprotected. I am not avoiding the movement from cowardice or fear of jail!"

"Keshu!" exclaimed Savarkar. "Has someone been giving you flak?"

"That is immaterial to me, Tatyarao, as long as you do not think it."

"Keshu, don't I know you better than that? I know what it is costing you to *not* go. You are sacrificing much in your devotion of me. And you have to listen to aspersions on your character on top of it." Savarkar shook his head.

"My foremost duty is to you, to be your bodyguard, Tatyarao. All else is secondary. Where will we be without you?" Keshu cried. "People can say what they like . . ."

"Every so often," said Savarkar with a smile, "some Congress member accuses me of being a coward, too, for not going personally to Hyderabad. Besides the fact that no one organizing the movement will allow me to go, I do not think it will serve any purpose, other than tremendous rioting and my summary execution! While I will willingly give up my life for my country, I will not waste it like this. So you see, Keshu, I understand all about duty and choices perfectly." Savarkar patted Keshu's hand. After a pause, he added slowly, "I am in dread that the Nizam will wreak vengeance on the protesters . . ."

"The end is near, Tatyarao; it *is* near!"

"I certainly hope so."

* * *

June 7: Early in the morning on the banks of the Penganga in Umarkhed, a vast crowd had converged for the sendoff of the protesters. Savarkar was standing under a small canopy giving a speech of encouragement. Across the river was the Nizam's land. A few feet away from the bank his police were watchfully eyeing the proceedings on this side. Hordes of people had come from the Nizam's land to see Savarkar. They hailed him as their savior.

It was 12:00 noon before the protesters, 150 of them, were marching across the bridge, Mamarao and Nathuram in the lead. Unarmed except for the Pan-Hindu flag they proudly waved, they walked straight and tall singing the *Vande Mataram* to the accompaniment of the band following them. The Nizam's people returned back to their land with them, giving them support fearlessly.

As soon as the protesters were out of sight of the crowd left behind, they were immediately rounded up—no one offered any resistance—and taken to the jail. All the cells were full to capacity. They were squashed in willy-nilly with the earlier protesters, who welcomed them; it gave them new heart to be with their compatriots. The summer heat was stifling. It was very uncomfortable in the cells, but they kept their spirits up by singing patriotic songs. Lunchtime came and went; there was no sign of food being served.

"When is lunch served here, Moghe?" Nathuram asked.

"They are very rarely on schedule, but perhaps they are planning to starve us today!" Moghe joked.

"Hmm!" said Nathuram thoughtfully; starvation seemed like a possibility.

"Not that their food is edible, half-baked bread and the curry . . . ! But it serves the purpose," Moghe continued. "The real difficulty is the rationing of water, and it is so hot."

The day went by. No food was served, drinking water was limited, and water for toilet facility was minimal. With so many people, the toilets were unmentionable. After an uncomfortable night's sleep, there was no respite and no food in the morning.

"Hey, warder!" Nathuram hailed a warder passing by his cell. "When can we expect to have a bath?"

"A bath . . . !" The warder laughed raucously. "Don't you talk to the others? You will get one bath in the week."

"What! We are Hindus—we take daily baths."

"Not here you don't! We have not enough water. Each day we allow some of you to bathe," said the warder and left.

At the open water tank beyond, Nathuram could see some protesters. A warder was using his lathi to push one away from it. The man was backing off covering his head.

"Hey, warder, come back!" Nathuram called out. "What goes on there?"

"Don't worry—that man is an untouchable. In this water shortage we can't let him touch the water!"

Nathuram felt a rush of anger go to his head. "This is intolerable! We are all equal! Call the Superintendent—immediately!"

"We aren't saying anything about our treatment here—not yet anyway. But to deny water to anyone for being an 'untouchable'—*that* we cannot stand for! What's it to you people, anyway? You are Muslims!" Nathuram told the Superintendent, shortly. "You will not break us up on caste basis; we are all united here for our cause. This nonsense must stop!"

The Superintendent prudently instructed the warders to disregard the caste differences. He had enough on his plate with the acute shortage of food and water. More supplies were ordered, though no deliveries had been made yet—*where were they?*—so far, no one was complaining. But there were a lot of young, hot-blooded protesters; who could say when they would erupt? He must be prepared!

At dinnertime, no food was served, but the protesters were released from their cells into the yard. The cool breeze

in the twilight was most welcome. Vishwasrao, Nathuram, Gajanan, and Mamarao had a quick conference. The food and water situation was intolerable. They decided to question the Superintendent, very politely and calmly. They certainly deserved an explanation! He was before them in quite a belligerent mood.

"Sir, how many days are you going to starve us?" Mamarao asked.

The Superintendent eyed them, and the crowd of protestors behind, a little nervously. What answer could he give? He had none. But he had come prepared for action. He nodded to the warder standing in the tower. Immediately, the bell started clanging loudly.

"What's the meaning of this, sir?" Mamarao exclaimed.

But the Superintendent was disappearing into his office.

"Mamarao, quick get back into your cell and shut the door. This signals trouble to come!" someone called out.

Mamarao gave quick instructions: "Nathuram, Gajanan, Vishwasrao, make sure everyone gets into their cells—the youngsters and elders especially; God knows what is coming our way!"

They all made haste but not soon enough. A horde of Muslim ruffians poured in through the gate, waving their lathis menacingly. *He Ram!* thought Nathuram. *So this is their wicked plan. Only some are safe yet . . . !* And then he had no more room for thought; a lathi whacked him hard on the back and knocked him to the ground. Howls and yells reverberated in the yard. Some were dragged to individual cells and hit repeatedly until they were utterly bloodied.

The warders started restoring order, but the shameful deed was done.

June 9: Savarkar returned to Bombay from his tour. The report of the atrocities had reached him. A similar situation had developed in Aurangabad. It was believed that the protesters were now kept shackled, hand and foot. Savarkar paced his room in a rage, rubbing his hand over his head. In a while, he

quashed his rage with his formidable control. It wouldn't do to go haywire. His people were there suffering, and their suffering could not be thrown away to no purpose.

What should be my next step? The Nizam must expect that by upping the violence, the protesters will give up. He has no idea of the mettle of the Hindus—they won't give an inch—but I must stop the violence. But how? How? Savarkar paced some more—until he had his plan of action clear: publicity for the treatment of the protesters in the Nizam's jail; bringing the question up before the Parliament in Delhi and London; and contacting the British Resident and the Police Commissioner in Hyderabad.

The Nizam would learn that there were consequences—he couldn't do as he liked even in his State, nor would the movement be hindered by such actions on his part!

And indeed, the movement, far, far from petering out from a fear of violence, gained new strength! What with this, and the publicity and outcry, the Nizam was ready to negotiate, if the movement was called off at once. Immediately, Savarkar's rejoinder reached him: The Nizam was aware of their demands—he needed to give a written public statement satisfying them *before* the movement was called off.

The Nizam issued the necessary statement on July 19; as a gesture of goodwill, for he had not satisfied all the demands, he released most of the imprisoned protesters as well. It was a tremendous victory for Savarkar and Hindu consolidation. The Nizam's capitulation included granting religious freedom and civil rights to the Hindus. For representation in the government he was not so forthcoming. He gave only 50 percent representation, but that was significantly more than the previous 15 percent or so. The Nizam's Muslim population held condolence meetings in their mosques, bemoaning the Nizam's capitulation—the insult to their pride, as they considered it.

The leaders of the movement came to a unanimous decision that it could now be suspended—though not called off. A

sharp eye would be kept on the Nizam to make sure he kept his promise; if not, the movement would be commenced again.

Savarkar was in full agreement with this plan. It was time to concentrate on the big picture. A war, that would affect the whole world, was about to break out. With the Nizam's capitulation, the Congress did a volte-face and now jeered the protesters for suspending their movement! *Sour grapes*, thought Savarkar and ignored them. The success of the Hyderabad Movement and the unity all the Hindus had shown had a cautious belief budding within Savarkar's heart. Yes! It was possible to save Hindustan.

* * *

With the whole world plunging into the expected World War, Congress took up a misguided stance of noncooperation with the Government and resigned from its ministries! Viceroy Linlithgow was not the kind of man to wring his hands in despair—even in this desperate hour of need. The Muslim support was now critical. The Viceroy turned to Jinnah for support, giving a *tremendous* boost toward strengthening his position in Indian politics. Jinnah—and his Pakistan scheme—had now arrived . . . !

The Government threw open the doors of opportunity for the Indians; military training and jobs, factories for building airplanes and weapons, and much more were up for the grab. The severe restrictions on the technological progress of India were lifted. Savarkar redoubled his efforts for the militarization campaign; it would surely bear fruit now—it *must*! Hindustan must be saved! If only his health held out, there was much that could be done, if only . . . !

Chapter Thirteen

1944

In the ensuing years, Hindu Mahasabha, under the brilliant leadership of Savarkar, had become a force to be considered. Savarkar had made it a point to publicize India's plight internationally. He had sent a telegram, published worldwide, to the President of the United States of America, Franklin D. Roosevelt, stating that the Atlantic Charter should recognize India's right to freedom, or else it was no more than a farce. He was the *only* Indian leader to take this bold stance.

By 1942 the United States took an active interest in the fate of India. President Roosevelt forced Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Britain, into making a move to resolve the Indian situation. But Churchill, being wholly opposed to freeing India, made no more than a perfunctory gesture. He sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a proposal bound to be unacceptable to all the Indian parties. Failure was inevitable.

Status quo was maintained: Jinnah pushing the Pakistan plan; Congress trying to muscle all other parties out of the reckoning; Savarkar still desperately fighting for the freedom of a United India.

Gandhi swore to the Indians: "I would sooner have you vivisect[78] me than India." *Yet* the Man of Truth, who claimed "Truth

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78 Vivisect is the word often used, especially in those days, to describe the partitioning of India. India was not just a piece of land to the Indians; she was a living entity—their motherland, their Divine Mother.

is God," lifted not a finger to veto the Delhi resolution passed by the Congress Working Committee accepting Jinnah's Pakistan plan . . . ! Some outraged Congress members passed resolutions at provincial levels to check this treachery. But Nehru came down heavily upon all and declared that the Delhi resolution superseded all others.

The Pakistan scheme encroached upon the freedom movement of India—unsuspected by the Indians—through the backdoor by the machinations of the Congress High Command.

In August 1942, Gandhi declared the "Quit India Movement," a culmination of the noncooperation Congress had declared on the Government at the beginning of the war. The slogan was catchy, even romantic—but very, *very* deceptive. While screaming for the British to leave India—at a very inopportune time with Japan snapping at the boundary and threatening to attack—Gandhi's "Quit India" plan intended that Britain keep her army behind. Britain to quit India in name only . . . ! It was no more than another grandstand.

Jinnah and all the Muslims stayed aloof from this movement. Despite the several drawbacks of this movement, Savarkar offered his support, *if* and only *if*, the Congress would declare their goal to be freedom for a *United* India—no province should be allowed to break away. Unity was paramount. But the Congress would *not* make that commitment.

At the onset, the Government came down severely upon this movement; all the leaders were thrown in jail. Gandhi was held in the Aga Khan palace. Without leadership, the movement, unplanned and unorganized to begin with, went completely haywire. The people, forgetting the principle of nonviolence, indulged in violence and destruction of property. Within two months the movement was ruthlessly quelled.

After this ignoble failure, Gandhi went on a twenty-one-day fast for "self-purification." *Yet* in those very days, he hatched a secret, very *impure* plot with Rajaji, his close associate and mouthpiece to the Viceroy.

July 11, 1944: Savarkar sat on his divan, sipping his tea as he read the morning papers. Suddenly he jerked straight up, slamming the cup, halfway to his lips, back on the saucer. It tipped over, spilling the tea on the end table. Oblivious, Savarkar scrambled up, yelling, "Gajanan! Keshu! Over here, quick!"

Keshu and Gajanan rushed into the room to find Savarkar pacing the room in a rage, the *Times of India* clutched tightly in his hands.

"Tatyarao!" exclaimed Gajanan, much alarmed. "What is it?"

"It passes all bounds!" Savarkar choked out, holding out the paper. "Here, read this!"

The *Times of India* featured an interview of Gandhi with Stuart Gelder of the *News Chronicle*, London. Gandhi had come right out in the open and bestowed approval upon Rajaji's proposal conceding Pakistan to Jinnah, if the Muslim League would endorse the demand for freedom. These proposals were, he declared, consistent with national integrity . . . ! What a back-stabbing move on Gandhi's part, a far cry from his "Vivisect me first" and "Partition is a sin"!

"Good God!" cried Keshu. "Does he think he owns Hindustan? On whose authority does he give his blessing to this nefarious proposal?"

"Gandhi is overreaching himself!" said Savarkar through tight lips. "At such a time as this too—Linlithgow had made statements in favor of the integrity of United India; Wavell is certainly talking about a United India! All the Indians, too, are staunchly for it. Pakistan doesn't have a leg to stand on, so Gandhi is giving it crutches . . . !"

"But *why* is Gandhi doing this?" asked Gajanan.

"Vanity? To be in the limelight? To keep sole power in the hands of Congress, perhaps?" Savarkar raged. "Nehru has been heard to say: 'Jinnah is a nuisance; let him take his Pakistan and get out of our hair.' But to act upon such frivolous utterings . . . ! Obviously, they are willing to hack our Hindustan, our *Mother,* into two, just to remove competition!"

Savarkar stopped his pacing and took a deep breath. "Gajanan, let us commence work. We have to call a meeting of all the HM leaders and contact the leaders of the other parties too. This cannot go unchallenged!"

In the coming days, Gandhi gave interview after interview reiterating this very same point. Rajaji, who had been pushing his Pakistan proposal for more than a year now, published his correspondence with Jinnah and declared that he had the Mahatma's blessing all along . . . ! *This* was the *impure* plot the two had cooked up between them during Gandhi's "self-purification" fast. Congress members were horrified at this about-turn of their leader. But after much helpless sputtering they did no more than retire into silence—so conditioned were they to follow the Mahatma's lead.

Young Hindu Mahasabhaites, led by Narayan Apte, met Gandhi in Panchgani to confirm this news. Gandhi—protected by four *gun*-toting guards!—admitted as much. They heckled him and held black-flag demonstrations in protest. But Gandhi only went one step further; he invited Jinnah to have a "talk" upon his return from Srinagar.

Savarkar worked hard and long; with several pithy press releases he repudiated Gandhi's pro-Pakistan move. A committee to organize assemblies protesting against this move was formed. L. G. Thatte, a young and aggressive Hindu Mahasabhaite, was in charge. The first week of August was declared anti-Pakistan week. Signatures were collected from leaders everywhere on letters that stated that United India was their goal. The Government and Secretary of State were categorically informed that Gandhi spoke *only* for himself. Indians were not obliged to honor his promises.

August 11: Savarkar dozed on his bed in the darkened room. Keshu sat near the desk reading by the light of the lamp. The little circle of light was well away from the bed. Every so often, he cast anxious looks at Savarkar's supine figure. Savarkar's health was really precarious. There were days he was unable

to get out of bed. These last few years of hectic working as the President of the HM had taken their toll. He had tried to resign year after year, but the people wouldn't let him. There was no one else capable of leading the HM.

"Keshu? Keshu . . ."

Savarkar was awake.

"I am here, Tatyarao," whispered Keshu.

Quickly he moved to Savarkar's side, filling a cup with water from the bedside table. He raised Savarkar up gently and held the cup to his lips.

"Ah . . . ! That felt good, thank you," said Savarkar, voice thready. "Keshu, how are things in the office?"

"Don't worry, Tatyarao. Gajanan has things in control. You focus on getting better."

"How I wish I could have handed the presidency to someone else this year—but to whom? No one stands out; they all get taken in by Gandhi's talk sometime or the other."

"Perhaps Gandhi's latest stunt will be an eye-opener for everyone. Who can have any faith in Gandhi after this?"

"I hope so, Keshu, I cannot go on another year. I can feel it. I am done for." He lay back on the bed and closed his eyes. "One by one, all my old colleagues have passed on: Madame Cama, Shyamji Krishnavarma, Rishi, even Dr. Hedgewar. My brothers—" he swallowed deeply "—Baba is so sick now—a blood transfusion every so often! He is living, so far away in Sangli, on borrowed time. Bal's health is feeble too. Thank God they are together. Vahini is taking good care of them. Forty-five years ago I set out on the path of freedom for our Mother. So much time has passed by and now . . ."

Keshu grabbed Savarkar's hand and rubbed it gently. "Freedom is very near, Tatyarao—after the war, Britain will have to give us freedom!"

"Yes, Keshu," whispered Savarkar, opening his eyes and turning toward Keshu. "Our Mother will get the Freedom Crown, but will she still have a head to put it on? Will they *chop* her head off? Will her arms be torn off?"

A tear formed at the corner of his eyes and rolled down to the pillow.

"Tatyarao, your ill-health is making you despondent."

"Yes, Keshu, yes. I am afraid that in the final hour of our Mother's need, I will be helpless. I couldn't bear that, Keshu, I *couldn't*!"—Keshu squeezed his hand comfortingly—"so much of our energy is spent in just counteracting Gandhi's schemes . . ."

"But we *are* counteracting them, aren't we, Tatyarao? You have brought about a lot of awareness amongst the Hindus. Hasn't Subhash Bose, taking your advice, taken the bold step of leading the Indian National Army? *Our* army, INA, the Army of Free India! Aren't they advancing from the outside into India?"

"Yes. Oh, how good that sounds," exclaimed Savarkar. "I believe the INA has 43,000 men and women recruits now. Initially, Subhash—no, no, let us give him his title—Netaji enrolled Indians from the British army who became POW! Now he even has volunteers from among the Indians overseas."

"Netaji has taken over the Andaman Islands and unfurled the flag of free India there!"

"Oh, it brings much solace to my heart, Keshu." Savarkar struggled to a sitting position, a gladness brightening his face. "But of course, the Congress leaders are screaming for his blood—he is a traitor, they say!"

"*Tcha!* I *really* do wonder just where their loyalty lies!"

Savarkar took a few deep breaths. "Keshu, can you open the curtains, please? I think I shall get up. Send Gajanan to me, will you, please?"

"Are you sure, Tatyarao?"

"Yes. I must stop moaning and focus on the work. There is so much to do!"

Keshu got up to open the curtains. "Tatyarao, shall I ask Mai to make some tea for you?"

"No, Keshu, do not disturb her. I cannot expect her to cater to my every whim."

"But, Tatyarao, it is just a cup of tea!"

"No, Keshu, I will not work her to the bone!"

"Okay. Then *I* shall make you one. I make a mean cup of tea. You won't say you object to working me to the bone, will you?"

Savarkar laughed. "No. No, I won't say that. Indeed, how can I with any truth—when I have you at my beck and call all day, every day?" Savarkar looked seriously at Keshu. "What would I do without you, Keshu? Or without Gajanan? I depend on the two of you."

"Tatyarao, I can lay my life down for you, and Gajanan feels the same. Some things are beyond words," said Keshu quietly and left the room.

Keshu located Gajanan arguing hotly with two young HM members. He was most happy to be rescued.

"Is Tatyarao feeling better, Keshurao?"

"Not particularly, but he wants an update."

"I'll make sure he doesn't overstrain himself; don't worry."

"I will get some tea for the two of you shortly."

"Thank you, Keshurao," said Gajanan gratefully. "I am much in need of some! It is a madhouse in the office today! Some of the hot young bloods talk so wildly!"

One such hot-blooded group was discussing their plan of action.

"Gandhi cannot be allowed to meet Jinnah!" declared Gokhale.

"Definitely not! We must prevent him," agreed Roy.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed Sahaa. "Let us kidnap Gandhi!"

Everyone stared at him. "Kidnap the Mahatma!"

"Why not? It will put the fear of God in him. Remember? In South Africa the Muslims gave him a beating for daring to criticize them? To this day has Gandhi *ever*, no matter what the provocation, spoken a word of criticism against the Muslims? I am a very good driver. We block his car, make the switch in a jiffy, and whisk him away. Holing him up for four or five days should do the trick."

"No," said Thatte, "we cannot be irresponsible. What will our leaders say? Savarkar will be most displeased. Let us picket outside his Sevagram Ashram and prevent him getting out of there. How can he reach Jinnah, then?"

This was an acceptable plan.

September 1: The group of protesters was stationed outside Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram in Wardha. Within the gates, three hundred acres of lush vegetation stretched to the horizon. A dusty road led to a wide clearing, free of all ground vegetation to deter snakes. Picturesque wide-spreading trees waved their branches gently in the breeze over whitewashed, thatched cottages. Birds twittered, the koyal cooed, a few people pottered around doing their chores—a peaceful community, far, far removed from the harsh reality that faced their motherland.

The protesters prowled restlessly, the same thought in all their minds—these seemingly innocuous surroundings housed one *apparently* harmless old man, capable of inflicting irreparable harm upon their beloved country. It was not to be borne! They prowled some more, presenting a very intimidating front. Gandhi tried negotiating with them through the ashramites. But the protesters were obdurate. Utterly fed up, Gandhi sent a message: "If you gentlemen will not remove yourself from here, I will cancel my meeting with Jinnah!"

"Wonderful!" was Thatte's prompt message back. "That is exactly what we want!"

But instead of cancelling the meeting, the police were called. One and all were rounded up and tied.

"Why don't you young people leave your leaders to deal with Gandhi?" asked an inspector to Thatte.

"We small fry are good enough to deal with Gandhi. Savarkar has more valuable things to do with his time!" was Thatte's quick reply.

"Are you fellows trying to become martyrs or what?"

"One of us will become a martyr when he kills Gandhi!"

The Inspector laughed. "That's not as easy as it sounds! Hey, what's that bulging from your jacket? Havaldar,[79] hold him tightly!" He reached in and pulled out a dagger. "Good heavens! Were you really planning to kill Mahatmaji?"

"I always carry a dagger for my protection. But you see it is not that difficult to kill Gandhi either. He'd better watch out!"

The listening ashramites were most alarmed.

Eventually, after the rumpus died down and the coast was clear, Gandhi headed out to Bombay—travelling in a special train reserved only for him; coincidently, British soldiers "happened" to be on it, too, and were able to offer *armed* security. Within two hours of reaching Bombay, Gandhi was at Jinnah's residence. The talks lasted for three weeks. Gandhi broke his Monday's vow of silence to keep the negotiations going. Every time it was Gandhi who went to Jinnah, not once did Jinnah return the courtesy. It was evident just who was calling the shots.

In the twilight of the October 2 evening, the sky was overcast. The sea was turbulent; curling waves were rising up in a foamy, white crest and smashing back onto the sand. The tide was creeping in—slowly. Keshu lay back on the sand; Lakshmi sat close to him.

"I am so worried, Lakshmi, so very worried. Tatyarao . . ."

"Don't lose heart, Keshu. We have come so far"—Lakshmi held on tightly to his hand—"see, the Gandhi-Jinnah talks have failed!"

"Just the fact that the 'talk' took place has given a tremendous boost to Jinnah's claim! His prestige is greatly advanced. Till now, the British were pussy-footing around him; now he has the 'Mahatma' bending over backward, double-crossing our motherland, for him! Gandhi even refers to him as 'Quaid-e-Azam'—Great Leader. *Tcha!* Also, Gandhi *did* agree to a separate State of Pakistan; talks didn't fail on that account, you know."

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79 Constable.

"Oh! Then why . . . ?"

"Gandhi refused to admit that Muslims in India were a separate nation; that Jinnah found unacceptable."

"But I don't understand. Why is Gandhi acceding to a separate Muslim State if he doesn't even believe they are a nation? Where's the logic?"

"Good heavens, Lakshmi," cried Keshu. "Gandhi has no logic! But he has developed dissembling to a fine art, and the whole might of the Congress press dissembles with him—it makes me sick! He is seventy-five years old today—getting on in age but still playing his tricks!" He sat up abruptly. "And into his dangerous, treacherous hands the Congress has given all the money of the Kasturba Fund. They *know* he will use the money as he sees fit—not necessarily for the good of Hindustan. How the Tilak Swaraj Fund was used is no secret! Why give him more money at a time when he is openly being a bogey?"

"He doesn't deserve a fund collected in his dead wife's name! I find what he did to his wife *unforgivable*! To deny her even one shot of penicillin as she lay there dying and in pain! For what? His principle of nonviolence . . . ? Didn't *he* have an operation for hemorrhoids? Doesn't he always manage to travel with an *armed* guard? If he can habitually sacrifice his principles on his own account, why not do so to save his wife . . . ?" She took a deep breath. "That shot could have at least eased her pain. His wife's plight didn't move him; we can't expect that he will be moved by the plight of the millions in Hindustan!"

"Yes! It is an unbearable strain on Tatyarao. He is at the end of his tether."

"You be there for him, Keshu. He is going to need you more than ever."

"I am so afraid, Lakshmi . . . !" Keshu shut his eyes, hoping to ward off pain.

Lakshmi watched him helplessly. "Keshu . . . Keshu . . ."

Keshu opened his eyes and tried to smile. "I'm okay, Lakshmi, just so worried about Tatyarao. Babarao . . . he may leave this world anytime, but Tatyarao won't allow himself to

think about it. He has encased his heart in solid iron—but it still bleeds . . . . It still bleeds."

"He *truly* has sacrificed everything for his country, hasn't he, Keshu?"

"Yes, Lakshmi, he has. He won't allow himself to be with his dying brother; he *can't*. Duty says he needs to be here, focused on saving our Hindustan, and that's that! Thank God that he has found someone to replace him as president. He says Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherji is finally convinced about Gandhi's duplicity. His feet will not falter now; he will be a capable leader."

"Oooh . . . !" exclaimed Lakshmi. A big wave had whooshed all the way to their outstretched feet. "Good heavens, Keshu, the beach has shrunk and we didn't notice. It is time to go back."

Early 1945

"Gajanan!" called out Savarkar.
"Yes, Tatyarao?"
"I want to go see Baba tomorrow."

"But, Tatyarao, we are knee deep in checkmating another of the Nizam's schemes," Gajanan exclaimed.

"He is asking for me, Gajanan; to wait may be too late. You can take care of the office. Please get tickets for Prabhat, Keshu, and me. Vishwas can stay behind to be with Mai; she is unwell."

There was no arguing with that.

February 5: They went straight from the station to see Babarao. One look at the skin-and-bones figure of his beloved brother lying supine upon the bed, and Savarkar's heart squeezed painfully. He sat by the bedside chair and took Babarao's hand in his own, gently.

"Baba!" he whispered. "Baba, I have come."

Very tiredly, Babarao raised his eyelids. His eyes were sunk deep into his face. For a moment he gazed blankly at

Savarkar—and then recognition dawned; a profound gladness suffused his face.

"Tatya . . . Tatya . . . ." His voice was a mere whisper, faltering and breathy. "Now . . . I can . . . die happy."

Savarkar took a shuddering breath but quickly schooled his face into an impassive mask. Only his fingers clutching Babarao's so convulsively betrayed the depth of his emotions. Keshu, Prabhat, and two well-wishers standing behind him faded from his consciousness.

"Baba, don't talk; it bothers you. We can sit here in silence."

"Tatya . . . let me . . . talk. Perhaps it is the . . . last time. Death is . . . so near."

Savarkar blinked rapidly to quell the tears that threatened to spill over. "We have thumbed our nose at death several times, dared it to vanquish us—we had our life's work ahead of us then. But now, now, beloved Brother, we have consolidated the Hindus to fight for their rights and the freedom of United Hindustan. We even have our own army! So now, don't fight it, Baba. Open your arms and welcome death—it comes as a friend."

Babarao sighed. "I know, Tatya, I know . . . . But I am sorry . . . leaving you alone . . . cannot be with you . . . till the end . . . till freedom."

Savarkar tightened his grip on Babarao's hand, but his words were calm. "Baba, we have lived by the principles of Karmayoga. We shall die abiding by them too. With life comes death. But don't fear that you leave me alone—do I not have all the Hindus with me?"

"Oh, Tatya, do you . . . really think so?"

"Yes, Baba, I do. Hindus will fight with us to put the Crown of Freedom upon our Mother's head."

"*United* Hindustan . . . Tatya?"

"Yes, Baba."

"Oh, I do . . . hope so," said Babarao, with a look of great satisfaction. "Tatya, quote . . . some lines . . . from *Upon the Death Bed* . . . please."

"Certainly, Baba. It will give you much solace.

O Death! I give you leave to end
The script of my life here,
Squandered not I even a moment of my life,
So the day's end brings no sorrow to me.
I have no fear, for what we sow here today
That blooms and bears fruit, so they say.
With hardship did I sow,
Choosing the best seeds,
Sowing them without expectation of fruit.
Heaven, hell, rebirth, captivity,
Release from the burden of human life—
All are but the consequence of one's own actions.
Where the door of Death shall open,
Predetermined it is by us, by the down payment paid
By our deeds and actions along the path of Dharma.
O Death! So, I fear not the graveyard,
What is it but an unfamiliar, foreign land?
And to ease the travel in this land,
Have not I from Lord Krishna
An introduction to every house on the way?

"O Death . . . ." Savarkar's voice petered out.

They sat in silence, eyes saying all that the lips would not. Babarao diffused the poignant moment. "All is … well, Tatya?"

"Baba, the Nizam is trying to consolidate his son's position with the neighboring Hindus. I am working on squashing that goal. Gandhi's statement that he would welcome the Nizam's rule all over India, would even consider it freedom, has given a boost to the Nizam's ambition, perhaps!"

Babarao rolled his eyes. In his depleted state, he could not express his disgust as he would like to. "Any more . . . tricks . . . from Gandhi?"

"Not since the Rajaji debacle. He has retired to his ashram—though in December he took a month-long vow of silence. *That* makes me nervous, Baba! At times like these he hatches his schemes! He is also threatening a fast, for many

reasons—one being that he thinks people like Dr. Shyamaprasad put spokes in the political wheel by believing that Jinnah is hand in glove with the British!"

Babarao rolled his eyes again. "What did our . . . Mother do to . . . deserve him?" His gaze went beyond Savarkar. "Tatya, Tatya . . . is that . . . Prabhat?"

"Yes, Baba, I am here," said Prabhat, coming forward. Silent tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Don't cry . . . silly girl. Death comes to . . . us all." Babarao extended his free hand feebly.

"Baba, Baba, I don't care about all—only you! I don't want to lose you."

She threw her arms around his neck and sobbed helplessly. Savarkar dropped Babarao's hand and got up quickly. He walked blindly past everyone there to the yard. There he stood, oblivious to the cold evening air, gazing fixedly upon a flowering bush. His whole being was concentrated on one thing—control, control, control! *Tatya,* he admonished himself, *you shall not—not—fall apart! Remember your oath—attachment to your brother shall not falter your steps! Karmayoga is the mainstay of your life. Attachment has no role to play. This body is just a vehicle to bear the soul. Baba's death is his final offering in the holy pyre of our freedom struggle. His body will die, but his work is immortal.* He dinned this in his head over and over, standing there until he was cold inside out.

"Tatyarao?"

Keshu had come looking for him. Savarkar paid no heed. Keshu touched his arm lightly. "Tatyarao, it is time to go in."

"In? Oh!" Savarkar snapped out of his trance.

"You don't want to get bronchitis again, Tatyarao. Shantabai has a hot meal ready."

Savarkar stayed in Sangli for just three days; then it was back to work again.

* * *

Within a month, another shocking piece of news was exposed. Bhulabhai Desai, a close associate of Gandhi, and Liaquat Ali Khan, Jinnah's right-hand man, had put their heads together at the instigation of Gandhi and drafted an agreement: *no* general elections to be held; instead Bhulabhai and Jinnah were to be invited to form an Interim Government with 20 percent of the seats reserved for minorities and the rest divided fifty-fifty between Congress and the Muslim League. This was an absolute shocker . . . ! The Mahatma making a devil's own pact! With one blow he axed the right of any other party, certainly the Hindu Mahasabha, from representing India and gave the 25 percent Muslim minority equal representation to the majority.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, discussing the draft with Savarkar, "Gandhi apparently convinced Bhulabhai to do the dreadful deed in the days of his vow!"

"I suspected as much! He intends to wipe us out of the running as if we don't exist. To give the Muslim League equal representation . . . ! It is unspeakable. It gives Congress and the League the right to do whatever they like with *our* country. But Gandhi has gone too far here. Nehru and Sardar will be livid with this pact—it puts Bhulabhai in control, not them. They will squash this pact, certainly! But . . ."

"What is it, Tatyarao?"

"Once something is put out there, you can't turn back the clock. Wavell is still taking the draft to London! Keshu, Keshu—it is *paramount* that the Hindus vote for Hindu Mahasabha and not Congress in the inevitable elections."

"Oh, *why* is our Hindustan divided by this communal constitution—Hindu seats, Muslim seats, minority seats . . . ! The Congress has a *lot* to answer for . . ."

"You know, Keshu, Congress can come to power *only* by the Hindu votes—and *yet* all their politics are aimed at sacrificing Hindu rights . . . ! Hindu Mahasabha *must* win the elections. That is the only hope for our Mother!"—he paced the room restlessly—"oh, why did my health break down at this crucial juncture! Why? Why? *Why?*"

"Tatyarao, you have been building up the Hindu Mahasabha for years. The leaders should be able to show a strong face to the wiles of the Congress."

"They *should* . . . but will they? Oh, Keshu, *will* they? This weak body of mine . . . !"—he sank into a chair—"it has served me well, but it needs to hold out a little more, just a little more."

"Tatyarao, you cannot keep pushing yourself like this; you cannot," pleaded Keshu. "Your health . . . your nerves . . . you so badly need a rest—"

"Rest, Keshu! In these times!"

"But, Tatyarao—"

"No buts, Keshu. Danger lurks everywhere. I must be vigilant. I must." He paused. His face took on the frozen, controlled look. Savarkar's thoughts were with his beloved brother. "Do you think, Keshu, I am here so far away from my dying brother to waste my time resting?"

There was no reply to make to this. Savarkar was going to fight for his country until he dropped. *Oh please God! Let it not come to that,* prayed Keshu silently.

Nehru and Sardar were definitely incensed. The Congress Working committee passed a resolution expressing an outrage at this draft and presented it to Gandhi. At this unprecedented show of strength, Gandhi backtracked. He quietly sent a message to Bhulabhai that he was not in agreement with the draft—one that he had personally supervised—and washed his hands off the matter . . . ! Bhulabhai was learning the cost of involving himself in Gandhi's toils. Nehru and Sardar gave him a severe drubbing for his effrontery in presenting a draft—so designed to promote his personal political ambitions—to Viceroy Wavell over their heads. Bhulabhai tried to explain that he was acting on Gandhi's orders, but the enraged duo was not ready to listen. Bhulabhai was *never* going to get *any* position of authority, let alone one on the Viceroy's Executive Council, they declared.

Poor Bhulabhai went racing to Gandhi to have his name cleared—but what do you know . . . ! Instead, Gandhi asked

him to give a statement to this effect: "I, Bhulabhai Desai, consider myself incompetent to be a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and also declare that I shall never accept such a job." Bhulabhai was enraged, but there was not much he could do. It wasn't the first time that the Mahatma had played this game.

* * *

Britain was still at war with Japan, though Germany had surrendered. In desperation, to make a breakthrough in the dead-locked Indian political situation and diffuse the internal tensions—so that all energy may be focused on checking the advance of Japan to India—Wavell announced his proposal for an interim government and held a conference at Simla. Members of all parties, representing all communities, were invited—except the Hindu Mahasabha! Wavell was operating on the premise that Congress represented all the Caste Hindus. Sure enough, his proposal did include parity—not between the Muslim League and Congress, as the Bhulabhai-Liaquat Pact wanted but between Muslims and Caste Hindus instead.

Here was the crunch for Congress—they were agreeable to the parity. *But* they wanted *only* Congress members to be selected for the Hindu seats and angled for the Muslim *and* minority representation by Congress members as well. The mask was off . . . ! Congress lay exposed in their blatant attempt to be in the sole control of running India. Jinnah, on the other hand, wanted all the Muslim seats for the League, leaving all the other Muslim parties, and certainly the Congress, out of the running.

The excluded Hindu Mahasabha launched several strong protests—Thatte took his group and agitated in Simla itself—to oppose the formation of this government. Wavell was again categorically told that Congress was *not* the representative of the Hindu majority. Savarkar struggled out of his sick bed and went on tours to wage opposition against this plan that led a

direct path to the partition of India and a sacrifice of Hindu rights. In the end Wavell dropped his idea.

* * *

"Keshu!" Mai was at Keshu's door.

"Mai, come in!"

"No, no, Keshu. I am very worried about *him*."

"Tatyarao is asleep, isn't he?"

"No—I can hear him pacing and muttering to himself."

"Oh no! And he had a temperature today too!"

Immediately, Keshu headed for Savarkar's room. Savarkar had taken Babarao's death in March very hard; his unwillingness to express his grief only made it worse. Now, even Prabhat, whom he doted on, was married and living away in Poona—he missed her too. And what to say of this never-ending treacherous politics! He tapped gingerly on Savarkar's door and went in. Savarkar turned sharply, almost tipping over at the sudden movement. Keshu rushed to give him support.

"Keshu! Not now, Keshu. I want to be alone!" Savarkar's body was burning with fever, his eyes red-rimmed and glazed.

"Tatyarao, you need to lie down—you have fever!"

"No, no!" cried Savarkar agitatedly. "I can't! My thoughts drive me crazy."

"Tatyarao, let us go to the garden. The night air, the flowers, perhaps they will be soothing."

Savarkar only looked blankly at him. But Keshu put an arm around his shoulder and led him gently outside.

"Keshu, it is unbearable to think how close we came to sacrificing Hindustan! If Wavell's Interim Government were to go through . . . !"

"But it didn't, Tatyarao, and we put up a strong defense, didn't we?" Keshu's voice was deliberately calm.

"Yes, we did," said Savarkar with satisfaction. "I take much solace in that! But each time Jinnah's position gets stronger and stronger and the British and Congress schemes get

worse and worse"—Savarkar squeezed his temples with both hands—"what next, Keshu? What *next*?"

"Tatyarao, this is a cozy bench near the flowers. You sit here, and I shall massage your head."

Savarkar looked ready to protest, but Keshu determinedly applied gentle pressure until he sat down. As his fingers moved rhythmically, he could feel some tension ease away from Savarkar's muscles.

"Keshu, the worst of it is—I have to fight the Hindu Mahasabha leaders, too, sometimes. Some came up with the idea to take a direct, rebellious action in protesting against Wavell's plan."

"Good heavens! That would achieve nothing but immediate imprisonment!"

"Exactly! And what good would that be? It would be playing right into the hands of the Government, Congress, and Jinnah. If elections are held, what seats can we contest from the jails? When will they *get* it?" Savarkar cried, but the desperation was going out of his voice. The peace of the night and the pressure of Keshu's fingers were working their charm. "Keshu, the massage feels good. My head was killing me."

"Why don't we go in? I'll give you a tablet for the fever and rub your head as you fall asleep."

"Yes, yes, perhaps I had better do that—who can say what tomorrow brings?"

Chapter Fourteen

August-December 1945

By August winds of change swept over the fate of Britain. The general elections in Britain resulted in a resounding victory for the Labor Party with Clement Atlee succeeding Churchill as Prime Minister. World War II ended on August 14 with Japan's unconditional surrender. The INA also surrendered. Britain had averted a colossal danger but was left in a very peculiar position—she was in debt to India to the tune of one billion pounds plus! The ruler in debt to the subject nation . . . ! In her beggared state, there was no immediate way for her to pay off this debt.

To add to this, the British officers stationed in India were overworked and looking for relief, but experienced replacements were not available. The British Indian Armed Forces were now staffed with 70 percent Hindus; most were there in answer to Savarkar's call of militarization, which he had openly declared, even to the Viceroy, was *only* for the Hindus to gain military experience, *not* out of any misplaced loyalty to the British. The patriotism of the INA had also made inroads into the psyche of the British Indian Armed Forces. Their rebellion on a large scale would signal the immediate and ignoble end to the empire.

The British Raj was tottering on *very* shaky ground!

Eagerly, the British sought to consolidate their position. Sixteen thousand INA soldiers had been captured and brought

back to India. Britain was now going to show everyone what the fate of traitors was! They would be tried publicly for waging war against the King of England. But this did not at all go down well with the Indians. The Indian hearts pulsated with love and admiration for the INA—the army of free India, symbol of their freedom. Indians had *never* shared the opinion of the Congress leaders that these brave soldiers were traitors. There was an uproar at this British outrage.

With this background, a solution to the Indian political situation was paramount. The Viceroy declared that elections would be held in December. The winning party would be considered a representative of the Indians, and a permanent constitutional solution to the Indian problem would be negotiated with it. Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha were the main contenders for the Hindu seats. Savarkar, from his sickbed, urged the Hindus to elect Hindu Mahasabha candidates. Of late, the Congress leaders had really exposed their treacherous intent toward India, so the people were well aware of the pitfalls of opting for Congress.

And well the Congress leaders realized this too! Drastic measures were required if India was not to slip through the Congress clasp. They immediately dropped a curtain on all their previous avowals and actions. With unlimited money pouring into their coffers from their industrialist supporters, they threw themselves into the election fray using the Savarkarian battle cry for a United India . . . !

No more did they call the INA soldiers traitors; they now hailed them as patriots to the Indian cause. Nehru—who had never really practiced law or distinguished himself at the bar—now donned his long-forgotten, dusty barrister's gown to be on the panel of counsel to defend the soldiers. Sincerity and patriotism oozed from the lying lips of the Congress leaders—they were aiming to win the elections, by fair means or foul.

It was iron willpower alone that dragged Savarkar to his office. Fever and digestive problems had weakened him

terribly. All his teeth, which had been giving him terrible pain for days, were pulled out. Until his dentures were ready, he was toothless. His state was pitiable.

"Gajanan, Congress will surely, surely sacrifice our Hindustan! I have drafted another appeal to the Hindus, including the Hindutva-minded Congress members, to join hands with the Hindu Mahasabha."

"Tatyarao, I will take care of it."

"And Gajanan, how is our fund for the INA soldiers' defense coming along?"

Gajanan was silent, fingers playing with the papers around him.

"Gajanan!" said Savarkar sharply. "What are you hiding from me? What has happened in the two days I was sick in bed?"

"Tatyarao . . . er . . . Congress has taken up the defense of the soldiers," said Gajanan, not meeting Savarkar's eyes. "Nehru, Bhulabhai, and Asaf Ali are the lead counsel."

Savarkar made no comment. Gajanan raised pained eyes to look at him. Savarkar sat frozen, face a mask. Minutes ticked by.

Gajanan was scared. "Tatyarao!" He touched Savarkar's arm. "Tatyarao! It's okay, Tatyarao. At least the INA soldiers will have the best defense money can buy. Tatyarao, talk to me . . ."

"Gajanan," said Savarkar quietly, "Congress is using these patriots—they who laid their life on the line fighting for our Mother—just to win the elections! Once in power they are going to betray them *and* drive a dagger through our Mother's heart."

"I know, Tatyarao. I know. I could weep at this Congress duplicity."

"The Hindus are falling for this ploy?"

"Yes," whispered Gajanan. "They are singing the praises of the Congress leaders."

"Oh the gullible, trusting Hindus . . . ! It doesn't bode well for us at the elections. Our candidates have to hang tough—campaigning must be strong."

"As for that . . ."

"More bad news, Gajanan?" asked Savarkar grimly.

"I am afraid so, Tatyarao. Congress is trying to break our candidates. They have paid ruffians threatening some of our candidates. Others they are bribing with promises of power in the future—any pressure they can think of, they are applying."

"Are our HM candidates so weak?" Savarkar's voice was icy calm. It was the calm before a storm.

"Not all, Tatyarao, but some, yes."

Savarkar looked upward, his fingers pinching his furrowed brow. Gajanan continued unhappily, "We have lost some candidates in Punjab and Nagpur."

"Nagpur!" Savarkar's voice was like a pistol shot. "But how can this be? It is solid, very strong in its stand for Hindutva. This is appalling! Gajanan! *What* are you doing?"

Gajanan was trying to hide a sheaf of papers under some magazines.

"Nothing, Tatyarao. They are just some letters. Not important."

"Why are you hiding them from me?"

"Tatyarao, they are just appeals from various candidates from all over the provinces—they want you to campaign for them."

"Campaign! I, who can barely walk from one room to the other, riddled with fever and whatnot, with no teeth in my head, must campaign! If the Hindus are not enlightened by my words all these years, are they going to be impressed by this shell that I am now? Look, look"—he pointed to his toothless mouth—"see how badly I speak. It's a wonder *you* can understand my garble." Savarkar started laughing, a high-noted, mirthless, derisive cackle.

"Tatyarao, don't . . . Tatyarao . . . ." Gajanan, ran a helpless hand through his hair.

"Here, give me those letters!" Savarkar grabbed the letters out of Gajanan's hand and with one vicious flick of his hand scattered them across the room. "Now get out, Gajanan!"

"But . . ."

"Go! Go! I wish to be alone . . . now!"

As Gajanan hesitated, Savarkar got up and hustled him out. He shut the door and bolted it with a snap. On the other side Gajanan stood still, utterly alarmed. He had never seen Savarkar like this.

Savarkar walked tiredly to his divan and sat on the floor before it, surrounded by the papers he had thrown. His hands moved restlessly over the papers. Tears started streaming down his cheeks.

"Oh Mother! My people are calling for me, and I am helpless . . . *utterly* helpless! I have failed you, O Mother, failed you!"—he sobbed, his body swaying back and forth, his hands beating a tattoo on his head—"the traitors are going to rip our Mother asunder, and yet, O ye Hindus, you are running to them? Wake up, O Hindus, wake up . . . . Oh Mother . . . *Mother!* . . ." he wailed.

Outside Keshu and Vishwas had joined Gajanan.

"Keshurao!" cried Vishwas. "What should we do? He has locked the door."

"He is crying. All the bottled-up grief, pain, and helplessness is pouring out. Let us wait outside and listen. If I need to I'll break the door down. Vishwas, bring Dr. Sathe."

Vishwas left immediately. The others waited with bated breath. It was a long time before the storm passed. The doctor had come and gone. He had left some pills to be given to Savarkar.

Inside, Savarkar wiped his face on his sleeve; slowly he got up. One by one he picked all the papers he had flung and held them close to his heart.

"Tatyarao!"

The door rattled. Keshu and Gajanan, worried at the silence, were calling out.

"Tatyarao!"

"I am okay, now. Don't worry." His voice was barely above a whisper.

"Please, open the door, Tatyarao. . . . *Please*."

Savarkar hesitated and then moved to open the door. Three worried and anxious faces looked at him. Savarkar looked away. A trickle of tears was rolling down his cheeks again, but he turned back to Gajanan.

"I am sorry, Gajanan, sorry. I was so rude to you."

"Oh Tatyarao!" said Gajanan, overcome. "Tatyarao, as if that matters! Come, let us make you comfortable. The doctor has left a pill for you."

"Pill?"

"Tatya, it will calm the nerves, help you to rest," said Vishwas.

Savarkar nodded.

Later, Gajanan and Keshu wondered what was to be done. They were extremely worried.

"Keshurao, I am so afraid for Tatyarao. What do we do?"

"We keep this quiet. No one need know anything more than he is unwell. But perhaps we can keep some arrangements ready—in case we have to take him away for a rest all of a sudden?"

"That's a good idea. I'll talk to Seth Gulabchand. He has deep love and respect for Tatyarao."

"I wish we could keep the political news away from him."

"He'll never allow that!"

"Whatever will be, will be, I suppose. We can only watch over him and protect him, Gajanan."

It was actually two days before Savarkar was able to get up from bed. Keeping a steely control on himself, he made it to his office again.

"Gajanan, I want to send replies to all those people. They have to rally around without me. I must let them know I cannot make it."

"Tatyarao, I will get them sent out today."

"Any more bad news?" Savarkar's eyes were anxious.

"Yes, there is, Tatyarao," said Gajanan, regretfully. "Gandhi himself has gone to campaign for Congress in Bengal!"

Savarkar smacked his fist on his thigh. "Bengal Hindus must be saved! Partition will affect them directly. Our candidates are firm and strong there, but . . . ." Savarkar was thoughtful. "Gajanan, bring Thatte here. Tell him it is urgent."

Gajanan left to locate Thatte, and soon he was before Savarkar.

"Thatte, I want you to go and campaign in Bengal for us. The Mahatma's soft, honeyed words and prayer meetings cannot be allowed to cloud the minds of the Hindus, nor should they win over our candidates!"

"Never fear, Tatyarao," said Thatte confidently. "Gandhi trembles when he hears I am around. We have our president, Dr. Shyamaprasad, there too. We'll show them our true mettle!"

"Words of that young man give me a ray of hope, Gajanan. I pray that it will be as he says," said Savarkar restlessly after Thatte left. He stretched out a trembling hand. "Gajanan, oh Gajanan . . . ! I can't bear it . . . oh God! I am getting the shakes!"

"Tatyarao, take slow, deep breaths," said Gajanan, striving for calm. "Let us have faith."

"Faith, ah, y-e-es! But how, Gajanan, *how*?" His breath was coming in big, shuddering gulps. "Our leaders are caving in to the Congress wooing; how will the people withstand it? I need fresh air, Gajanan. I can't breathe properly here. Take me outside."

Gajanan led him out slowly and gently. In the garden, after a few minutes of deep breathing, Savarkar got some measure of calm. Gajanan was much relieved.

"Gajanan, will Shyamaprasad stay strong . . . ? Not be swayed by Gandhi . . . ? What if . . ."

"Tatyarao, don't anticipate trouble—please. Let me give you some good news instead."

"Yes, Gajanan? We could certainly do with some of that."

"Some of our lawyers are defending the INA soldiers."

"Oh thank God. *Thank God!*"—two tears, escaping his control, rolled down his cheeks—"thank God! It is an honor

to defend these patriots. Our very own army! See how much patriotic fervor they have stirred in the people? Nothing we can do for them is too much."

"Congress has the most prominent cases, of course."

"Congress would; their motives are not pure. They seek the limelight. But even the ordinary soldier of the INA deserves the best defense—and we'll give it to them!"

"It's a real pity that Netaji's plane crashed. Some say it was sabotage. Others say he is still alive, in a Russian camp, perhaps."

"Who knows, Gajanan, who knows? The ones in power play games and pull strings; power is what makes the world go around. Our sincerity, our dedication, counts for nothing." Savarkar sighed despondently. "I am so tired, Gajanan, so very *tired*!"

That night, like so many nights now, Savarkar lay on his bed, awake. His fever was running up again. Turbulent thoughts were chasing each other in his brain. Was it *this* easy to wipe out years of work? He had driven himself to the ground to establish the Hindu Mahasabha, to wake up the Hindus to the danger to their country—and everything had come along so well. Surely one election campaign didn't sweep all that away? Surely not? He could hear his Mother India shrieking, howling in pain. The Goddess of Freedom was there to bless her . . . but at what cost? The axe to hack her was poised over her head—*only* the Hindu Mahasabha stood in the path of its cutting edge, only the Hindu Mahasabha! *O Mother, let the Hindus not be duped into electing the Congress. Oh, how I pray they don't fall for their false promises! They know, they have seen how treacherous the Congress leaders are—they have! O Mother, I must save you, I must. But how? How? This wretched, weak body . . . !* Silent tears were rolling down his cheeks; he had the bed sheet balled up in two tightly clenched fists. The pain in his heart surged up to his lips, seeking release in shrieking. He kept his lips clamped tightly shut. He must keep hope alive; hope was all he had now. Thatte would hold out. Bengal would stand firmly behind

Hindu Mahasabha—perhaps the lost candidates would come back . . . ?

And so went his thoughts, round and round.

In Bengal, Thatte's presence did make Gandhi somewhat nervous. He curtailed some of his activities and sent negotiators to woo Thatte toward Congress. But Thatte was made of stern stuff, and so were many other Bengal Hindu Mahasabha candidates. Congress desperation was running high. Hindu Mahasabha's chance of winning the elections had been sabotaged to a large extent—but was it enough to guarantee its complete rout? Stakes were high. Power is a heady drug. The Congress went for the jugular of the Hindu Mahasabha.

"Gajanan! Gajanan!"

Savarkar, reading the papers quietly in his bedroom, had stumbled upon some unpleasant news. Gajanan rushed in, followed by Keshu. Lately, they were alert to every nuance in Savarkar's voice. Savarkar was looking at them with shocked eyes.

"Why am I reading that Gandhi has solicitously sent his very own doctor to care for Shyamaprasad? What is Gandhi cooking now? What is wrong with Shyamaprasad?" The questions were tumbling from his lips. "I must go downstairs and make a phone call to him. I must."

He made as if to get up, but Gajanan's outstretched arm stalled him.

"Wait, Tatyarao. I have a telegram for you, sent by Dr. Shyamaprasad."

Savarkar's heart sank to his feet. "Telegram? Oh no, no! He wouldn't . . . he couldn't . . . ?"

Savarkar slipped his right hand inside his shirt and rubbed his chest over the heart in a kneading motion. Keshu and Gajanan were poised for immediate action. But Savarkar just sat there, shoulders slumped, head hanging low. Minutes passed in silence. Then Savarkar raised his head, eyes glittering. He stretched out his hand.

"Let me have the telegram."

He read it quickly and laughed—another of those awful laughs that stabbed them straight in the heart.

"Look at this—Shyamaprasad is seeking permission to withdraw his name from the election. He is unwell, he says!" Savarkar laughed again. "President of the Hindu Mahasabha to withdraw his candidacy . . . ! And we hope to win the election?"

There was a small silence; then he rapped out, "What's the story behind this, Gajanan?"

"Well," said Gajanan, "the strain of campaigning made him sick. Gandhi's doctor is hovering solicitously around Shyamaprasad. He is constantly advising that Shyamaprasad take complete rest. But . . ."

"Yes, Gajanan, but . . . ?"

"I made enquiries, and I have heard that Shyamaprasad has borrowed a lot of money to start his new newspaper. And now the creditors are insisting on collecting immediately—unless he withdraws his name from the elections. I believe it has also been suggested that he might get a seat on the cabinet if he does that."

Savarkar got up to pace the room. "Send him an urgent telegram. Give him my sympathies, but remind him that this is no time to be taken in by foes or masked friends. Bengal cannot go the way of Nagpur and Punjab!"

The telegram was duly sent, but Dr. Shyamaprasad did not heed it. He withdrew his name from the elections.

With the exit of the president from the election battleground, the morale of the rest of the Hindu Mahasabha candidates crumbled. The people lost faith in the Hindu Mahasabha as well.

The Congress leaders were brilliant and mesmeric in their impassioned avowals for United India. They swore with all that was in them that they would *not* sanction a Pakistan. United India was the goal! The Hindus of India, forgetting the events that happened just a short time ago, fell lock, stock, and barrel

for the empty campaign slogans and cast in their lot, and that of the helpless Hindustan, with the Congress.

December 25: The election results were out—Congress won the Hindu seats in a landslide and the Muslim League won all the Muslim seats. Savarkar, who hadn't slept for days, who was still hoping against hope for a miracle teetering on the brink of a nervous breakdown, went over the edge.

"A total rout for Hindu Mahasabha—nothing? Nothing?" he cried out. "Oh, who will save my Mother now? Who? Who? Aaaargh! . . . Aaaargh!"

He started flailing his arms as if beating away imaginary attackers, his screams coming from the very depth of his tortured soul. Quickly, Keshu went to him and held Savarkar in a close embrace, trapping his arms so he wouldn't hurt himself. Savarkar struggled wildly, but Keshu held on tight, saying gently, "Hushhh, hushhh . . ." as if to a baby. Anticipating some such trouble, Dr. Sathe was at hand. He came over quickly and administered a shot. Within moments Savarkar went limp. Keshu carried him to his bed and laid him gently on it.

The doctor was clear on what was to be done. "Get him away from here. Peace and quiet and absolute seclusion—that's what he needs."

"We have made arrangements to be in Walchandnagar, if need be," said Gajanan.

"Make haste! If Savarkar has to retain his sanity, you will have to take very, very good care of him! I will give you the reference to a Dr. Bhide there."

Mai, Vishwas, Gajanan, and Keshu all four who loved Savarkar from the bottom of their hearts, vowed silently to take the best care of Savarkar—he was *not* going to lose his mind!

Chapter Fifteen

January-August 1946

January 1: They reached Walchandnagar in the evening. Savarkar had been sedated during travel. Vishwas was staying with him in the room the first night. A dim lamp gave a gentle light in the room. He lay awake on his cot anxiously watching his father sleep. Savarkar's sleep was disturbed—he jerked, stirred restlessly, moaned but did not waken. Vishwas's eyelids drooped.

"Aaaargh!"

Vishwas shot right up. Savarkar was out of bed, on shaky legs, groping toward the night stand. He was yelling, "You shall *not*! Don't come . . . don't come . . . oooh . . . oooh!"

He picked up the water jug and flung it across the room. Vishwas ran to him.

"Tatya, Tatya . . . !"

Savarkar looked at him with unseeing eyes. "You! You are here to hurt my Mother, my Hindustan . . ."

The door opened and Keshu and Gajanan followed by Mai burst into the room. One look at the scene and Keshu rushed to hold Savarkar as he had before. Savarkar struggled like a trapped pigeon, screaming, but Keshu held him tightly. Spent, Savarkar collapsed against Keshu's chest, but Keshu did not let go. Then Savarkar raised his face; tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"They are coming . . . . They are coming! See . . . see that hole in the wall? They are going to get . . . . Baba, Baba,

where are you? Why did you leave me alone? See, they are coming . . . coming . . ."

Oh God! He was hallucinating!

"Tatyarao," said Keshu gently but firmly, "Tatyarao! It is me—Keshu."

"Keshu? Keshu?" cried Savarkar between sobs. "There is danger . . . so much danger . . . . Stop them from coming . . . stop them . . ."

"Tatyarao, I am your bodyguard. I won't let anyone harm you. You trust me, don't you?"

"Not me . . . not me . . . danger to my Mother . . . . Oh God . . . oh God. He has a machete . . . no, no, no," Savarkar screamed. "*No* . . . aaaargh. He chopped her head, my Mother's head . . . . She bleeds. Oh, won't someone help her? Please . . . please . . ."

Mai ran out of the room; she couldn't bear it. Vishwas followed her. Tears were running down Keshu and Gajanan's cheeks. This was *heartbreaking*! The horrific scene of his mother's last moments rose before Keshu's eyes; he brushed it away impatiently. Not now; now they had to console Tatyarao—somehow. He indicated to Gajanan to turn on the light. He gently rocked Savarkar's shaking body. Slowly, slowly, the babbling petered out and the tension went out of his body. Now he was only taking dry, gulping sobs—then they, too, died down. Savarkar looked up at Keshu, this time with recognition in his eyes.

"Keshu, Keshu, what is happening to me?" he asked painfully.

"Nothing a few days rest won't cure, Tatyarao, and you are feverish too," Keshu replied with all the calm he could muster. "I am going to lead you to the bed. Gajanan will get you medicine and a sleeping pill. We'll give you a sponge bath, and you can have a good night's sleep in fresh clothes."

"Don't leave me . . . don't . . . ," cried Savarkar pathetically.

Pain stabbed Keshu's heart. "No, Tatyarao, I will never leave you. I will stay here tonight and every night."

"Keshurao," whispered Gajanan, "you stay with him. I'll take care of everything else."

A little while later, the spilled water was mopped up, fresh water was provided, and Savarkar was tucked into bed with fresh clothes. Savarkar was falling asleep, his hand still clutching Keshu's.

"Gajanan, make sure Mai is all right, and then you go to sleep too."

"Oh, Keshurao, will we ever sleep again?"

"We must, Gajanan; we must keep up our strength. Who will take care of Tatyarao if we fall apart?"

"Yes, yes," agreed Gajanan sadly.

The night passed.

Gajanan relieved Keshu in the morning. At his enquiring look, Keshu whispered, "His fever is still raging. I have applied cooling cloths to his forehead all night. Be alert; the effect of the sleeping pill is wearing off."

Gajanan watched Savarkar anxiously, jumping at his every restless move, his every pained moan—and they were many.

"Water . . . please."

Savarkar was waking up. Gajanan raised him gently and held the cup to his lips.

"Gajanan . . . Gajanan"—Savarkar pressed a weak hand to his forehead—"can you stop them screaming?"

The room was dead quiet; there was no sound from outside either. Gajanan's heart sank.

"Tatyarao, who is screaming?"

"I don't know. . . . I hear it . . . here!"—Savarkar beat his head with the pad of his palm—"just make it stop . . . *please!*"

The beating on the head took on a frenzied pace.

"I will, Tatyarao, I will!" assured Gajanan quickly, putting a preventive hand on Savarkar's arm. *But how?* he wondered, agonized. *How?* "Let me put this cool cloth on your forehead; perhaps it will absorb the screams."

Savarkar fell back tiredly onto his pillow. The cool strips of cloth gave him no relief. He tossed and turned restlessly.

"Stop it—take it off! Off! Oh God, it's so hot here . . . so hot!" He tried to throw off the covers.

"No, Tatyarao, no! You have to sweat out the fever!" said Gajanan, grabbing the covers. "Tatyarao, I'll put the fan on for a little bit. Wait, Tatyarao!"

Quickly, he let go and turned the table fan on. A gentle mechanical whirring filled the room, creating a breeze. Savarkar, still muttering and struggling with his covers, stopped short.

"What's that?" His eyes were widened to the fullest, his tones full of anxious fear. "Oh, they are coming again! They are coming! Why, oh why, can they not leave my Mother alone—"

He tumbled out of bed, tripping over the covers that tangled his legs.

"Tatyarao, you will hurt yourself!"

Gajanan tried to hold Savarkar as Keshu had done. He didn't like this tussling with Savarkar. Savarkar stood up on shaky legs with Gajanan still hanging onto him.

"Where's my sword? I'll show these monsters!"

Vishwas burst into the room. Gajanan almost cried with relief.

"Turn the fan off, Vishwas, quickly, quickly!"

With a quick flick of the switch the whirring died down; Savarkar was past heeding anything. He strained desperately at Gajanan's hold.

"Let me go! I must help Baba. He's alone. Let me go, let me *go*!"

He broke loose. Wildly swinging an imaginary sword gripped with two hands, he advanced angrily toward the back wall. Gajanan and Vishwas looked at each other helplessly.

"Vishwas, get Keshurao. He'll know what to do."

Vishwas hurried out. Gajanan, gathering his courage, pounced on Savarkar. It seemed a sacrilege to treat Savarkar so. But what else was one to *do*?

Keshu had fallen into a deep, exhausted slumber. Vishwas entered his room.

"Keshurao!"

Keshu sat up, looking at him with sleep-drenched eyes.

"Tatya . . . we need help!" cried Vishwas.

Instantly alert, Keshu bolted out the door. In his room, Savarkar was struggling desperately in Gajanan's grip; his breath coming in pants made it impossible for him to speak. But his lips were forming the words "Must save my Mother . . . must save her!" over and over again. The veins stood out on his forehead, fluttering wildly; his face was suffused with color; his cheeks drenched with tears—into this scene Keshu rushed.

"You!" sputtered Savarkar, making great effort. "You said you would stay with me—save my Mother. Where were you? Where were you? I . . . I . . . aaahhh . . . aaahhh . . ."

Savarkar stopped struggling and clutched his chest over the heart with both hands. "It *hurts*! . . . It hurts!"

His body sagged in Gajanan's arms, his head lolling forward. Heart attack? Everyone froze in horror for a second. Then Keshu carried the unconscious Savarkar and gently laid him on the bed. Mai, hearing all the commotion, had already called Dr. Bhide; he was on his way. She stood by the door, helplessly twisting her pallu. Keshu rubbed Savarkar's palm. Vishwas fell to his knees at Savarkar's feet. *Is he . . . ?* they all thought. Gajanan kept checking for Savarkar's breath—yes, it was there.

Moments went by like years, and then the doctor was there. He had no good news to give. These nervous outbursts and hallucinations coupled with the raging fever were causing a tremendous strain on Savarkar's heart. His fate was in the balance. Round-the-clock nursing and medication, to keep him calm and rid his body of fever, would be necessary.

The days that followed were very critical—but they did pass.

By the middle of January, Savarkar's fever was gone; he was gradually weaned off the tranquilizers. No more was he prone to wild rantings and hallucinations, but a deep depression had set in. He was listless and disinterested in everything. Silent tears would roll down his cheeks. Sometimes he agonized over the fate of his beloved Hindustan; sometimes he bemoaned

it—but he was still sunk in apathy. Everyone despaired. How were they to get past this? *How?*

* * *

Seth Gulabchand's home was a beautiful two-story structure with a vast garden planted with much greenery and colorful flowers. Savarkar's room, on the first floor, had a covered patio attached to it. A paved walkway beyond it went around the entire house; beyond that stretched an expanse of green lawn, with a parijat tree right in front of the patio. There were plenty of other shady trees—gulmohar, mango, banyan—planted around. Tall hedges of pink bougainvillea around the boundary gave privacy to the yard. To the rear were the flower and fruit gardens. One end of the patio had a swing seat, the other a white painted wrought iron table with chairs. Potted plants and flower beds were laid along the walkway. It was an ideal, soothing setting to heal a disturbed mind and broken heart.

Savarkar had just got up from a nap and was sitting up in bed. The fingers of his right hand were pulling nervously at the sheet, his eyes trained to the floor. The curtains were drawn; the splendor of nature was blocked out. This was the way he preferred it. The wall light, kept on twenty-four hours, glowed.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, getting up from his chair, "it is beautiful outside—let me open the curtains."

"No, Keshu, don't!" Savarkar quavered.

"Your favorite parijat is right outside; you'll love it, Tatyarao. It still has late-season blossoms on it," coaxed Keshu.

"No," said Savarkar, not looking up, "let it be."

Keshu stood silent for a minute and then sat down—no sense in pushing it.

"Keshu," said Savarkar, very quietly, eyes still downcast, "tell me the truth. Am I going mad?"

"No, Tatyarao, no!" Keshu exclaimed, shocked. "Never think that!"

"I have seen people lose their mind. Remember Ullaskar, Keshu?"

"Tatyarao, in the hellhole of Andaman what chance did poor Ullaskar have? Here you have us. We love you. We will take care of you."

"I couldn't bear to be so vulnerable to anyone else—I don't trust easily, but I do trust myself to you all; I do." He looked up, his eyes tortured. "I babbled senselessly and ranted, did I not? Did I not, Keshu?"

Unable to bear his pain, Keshu caught his hand and moved to sit next to him on the bed.

"We will get through this, Tatyarao. I have great faith in the power of your mind and your will."

"What mind? What will? See, see how my body shakes? I can't even control that, Keshu."

Savarkar held out his free hand; his fingers were trembling uncontrollably. He pulled his hand out of Keshu's grip and sank his head in his hands, utterly abject.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, "*anyone's* mind can cave in. The human mind can take only so much. The real test is in the recovery once the mind is hurting—not everyone can pull themselves out of there. It takes a great will, a great discipline, a strong character."

Savarkar looked up at him, intently. "A strong character . . . a great will . . . ," he muttered, almost to himself.

Just then Gajanan came in with tea and set it on the night stand. With a subtle movement of his eyes, Keshu indicated that he should open the curtains. Gajanan's eyes widened; he sent a quick glance at Savarkar. He was still muttering to himself. Keshu waggled his eyebrows urgently. Gajanan nipped quickly to the curtains and dragged them open.

That caught Savarkar's attention. "Keshu, didn't I say—" his words cut off abruptly; he had spied the beautiful, spreading parijat with its abundance of unique white flowers.

Gajanan hesitated by the curtains, but since Savarkar didn't say anything more he left them open. As he pulled a chair to

the bed, he could hear Savarkar repeating to himself, "I must have a great will; I must."

Over his head, Keshu and Gajanan exchanged jubilant looks. This was the first step to recovery!

The next day, Savarkar *asked* to have the doors to the patio open, and by the end of the week he was taking his morning tea at the table, now moved from the patio to the shade of the parijat. Keshu, Gajanan, and Vishwas sat with him. They were so happy with this progress! As was usual now, Vishwas picked up Savarkar's teacup to hold it to his lips.

"Vishwas," said Savarkar, "put it back down. I think I'll drink it all by myself."

This was getting better and better! But the cup rattled in Savarkar's trembling fingers and some tea spilled over. He was dismayed.

"Tatya," Vishwas put in quickly, "it doesn't matter. Try again."

But Savarkar hesitated. Gajanan quickly got up, wiped the cup clean, and held it to Savarkar's lips, saying, "Tatyarao, whatever you are unable to do for yourself, we will do for you. We are all in this together"—Savarkar was silent—"today you tried, tomorrow you'll try some more, and the next day you will succeed!"

Still silence.

Some distraction was needed. Keshu had a plan; now was a good time to bring it up. Briskly, he said, "We shall go for a walk, Tatyarao."

"I don't want to go out!" said Savarkar fearfully.

"Not out, Tatyarao, here in the yard. We'll explore that beautiful flower garden there."

"I am not sure I can walk. I feel weak." Savarkar objected, but he was feeling the pull of nature.

"Well, Vishwas has a surprise for you!" Keshu beamed.

Vishwas left them and was back in a few minutes rolling a wheelchair.

"A wheelchair!" exclaimed Savarkar, taken aback.

But before he could quite react, he had been maneuvered into sitting in it. Keshu wheeled it onto the walkway and headed to the garden.

Vishwas went in to be with Mai. She was having a very difficult time here.

"Mai, Tatya is going to the garden in the wheelchair!" he told her happily.

Mai burst into tears and hastily hid her face in her pallu.

"Mai!" exclaimed Vishwas, aghast.

"Vishwas, I am so happy . . . so very happy," cried Mai wiping her eyes. "He'll get better now, won't he? Won't he?"

Vishwas put his arms around her shoulders. "Of course he will, Mai," he said gently.

She looked at him pitiably. "All day I worry, and I pray and then pray some more . . . . What else is there for me to do here? *He* doesn't need me . . ."

There was nothing Vishwas could say to this. Only they, the three men, took care of his father; indeed, that's how he preferred it. Mai's presence unsettled him. Perhaps he didn't want to trouble her? Or appear before her in this weak state? Vishwas wasn't sure. The house, too, was run on oiled wheels by a battery of Seth Gulabchand's unobtrusive servants. Since Savarkar was to be kept isolated they had no visitors. She counted on Vishwas; he devoted most of his time to her.

The others were enjoying a very peaceful walk. Colorful flowers—jasmine, rose, hibiscus, morebougainvillea—bloomed everywhere; the fragrance was intoxicating. There were three stone open water tanks strategically placed here and there; a ready supply for watering the plants. They stopped and watched a group of bulbuls and sparrows playing in one, dipping in and shaking off the excess water by fluttering their wings. A little chick was pecking on the ground, totally engrossed. Suddenly, a cat crouching low on the ground crept swiftly out of nowhere, pounced on the chick, and disappeared quickly into a bush with it. Peace was shattered by frightened squawks and desperate fluttering of wings—the other birds

taking flight. The three men were aghast. The mood was quite dispelled.

"The law of the jungle," said Savarkar, "nothing to be done about it. Take me inside now, please."

Later, Savarkar was settled on his bed, resting. Gajanan was with him. Keshu was out running errands. Vishwas was with Mai.

"Gajanan," said Savarkar quietly, "you know, the Congress cat pounced and ate the Hindu Mahasabha chick, just like the scene in the garden. I assured Baba that he could die in peace—that the Hindus would now fight for United India and their rights; how wrong I was! Is there any hope? Oh Gajanan! . . . Is there?"

"Tatyarao," said Gajanan quickly, before Savarkar could follow his thoughts into depression, "I have been thinking. Thanks to you, there is much enlightenment in the Hindus, even the Congress members. I feel sure they will put up a great fight against their High Command—and if partition is inevitable, perhaps they will give up only what they must."

"Do you mean, Gajanan," Savarkar said quietly, "that they will not chop off our Mother's head and arms but only cut her ears and fingers?"

"Something like that, Tatyarao," muttered Gajanan, not able to look him in the eye.

"And we should console ourselves with that?" Savarkar was tart, sounding quite like his old self for a moment.

Gajanan swallowed but continued manfully, "Tatyarao, I really do think the Hindu Congress members will not sell our Hindustan out. Whatever part of it remains with us, they will not allow Gandhi and Nehru to sacrifice Hindu rights in it. Sardar seemed sincere in his avowals. He has a lot of following in the Congress."

"I suppose, Gajanan, the die is cast." The moment had passed, and Savarkar was despondent again. "No matter how much I want it, it is not now in my power to bring honor to my motherland the way she deserves. I hear this shrieking in my

brain—all the time. Is it my own? Is it my beloved Hindustan's? I don't know. I don't know!" Tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Tatyarao, I will massage your head; it may give some relief."

Later on at night, when Vishwas was watching over Savarkar, Keshu and Gajanan discussed just how they should go about Savarkar's rehabilitation.

"You know, Gajanan, for forty-seven years plus, Tatyarao has not taken a breath unless it was for the benefit of our country or people. He is bound to be at a loss now—he believes he hasn't a goal left; that he is a failure. Somehow we have to change that."

"I presented to him a new way of looking at today's political situation."

"That's very good, Gajanan!"

"He wasn't very impressed," said Gajanan dolefully.

"Doesn't matter. Repeat it often enough in different ways—even if he doesn't agree, it will make him think, take his mind off the past. I have an angle I want to put before him myself."

Gajanan was thoughtful. "How about we put a photo of Lord Krishna right opposite his bed?"

"Brilliant, Gajanan!" cried Keshu, clapping his shoulder. "Lord Krishna has always been a great source of inspiration to Tatyarao!"

"It is a pity he has no interest in books . . . just like Andaman."

"No, Gajanan, *not* like Andaman!" Keshu said, shaking his head. "That was different. There it was his *body* that failed him. He had the wish to read but couldn't."

"Yes," said Gajanan. "Now it is his mind . . . . Keshurao, the continuous unbroken stress for forty-seven years, under the most horrendous circumstances almost all of it . . . do you think . . . ?"

"Don't worry, Gajanan, he *will* make it. Perhaps we can think of some ways to revive his interest—tickle his brain. He is phenomenal; hasn't he made some progress already?"

"I thank God for it, Keshurao! I don't think I could have survived any more of those attacks of hallucinations and watching him beat himself—those were quite the darkest days of my life!"

"Yes, thank God, Gajanan!" Keshu agreed fervently.

That night, Savarkar was doing his own thinking. It was not easy. The screams inside his head, the constant hum and vibrations he could feel in his brain, made life *impossible*. Many times he wished he could bang them out of his head, that he could close his eyes and never wake up. It took willpower just to go on from moment to moment—but that was not enough; no, it was not. Savarkar put his palms on either side of his head and squeezed; yes, that was better. He must concentrate on his thoughts; he must. How had he got to this point? Was this how he was going to die? Feeble, old, and *pathetic*? No! What had changed, after all? He still had his oath; his beloved Hindustan still needed him—impossible to think with equanimity of his beloved country being hacked! Only cut her ears and fingers off, indeed . . . ! Politically he was washed out, but there had to be something he could do. He must at least *try*. His people needed him. There could be great horrors in store for them, now. *Yes*, he must get better; he must! He didn't have to leap the ocean in one jump. He could cross it little by little. His head *ached*. But it couldn't ache forever. Surrounded by love and caring, in this beautiful, peaceful house he had the best chance of getting better—how had he not stepped out of the house for almost a month? He must commence his yoga and meditation too. Keshu was right, all he needed was discipline and a great will . . . a great will . . . a . . . great . . . will . . .

He fell asleep; the sleeping pill was doing its job.

* * *

"How many times, Keshu, have we dreamed of the flag of free Hindustan fluttering atop the Himalaya—what is Hindustan without Kashmir? The Himalayas are there in the

very roots of our civilization. How can I imagine a Hindustan without them!" said Savarkar as Keshu wheeled him around the garden.

"That will be in the hands of the Maharaja of Kashmir, I suppose, Tatyarao. He is a Hindu."

"But his subjects are of Muslim majority."

"The situation is very complex. The next year or two is one of hardship for our Hindustan—which brings me to what I wanted to mention—"

Savarkar turned to look at Keshu enquiringly.

"We have been thinking of our Hindustan as our mother, but after freedom Hindustan will be more like a newborn baby. It is the first time in history that we shall have a democratic government. God knows how many things are there to be determined!"

"Yes, yes," said Savarkar thoughtfully. "Good heavens! Congress will certainly want their flag—that atrocious spinning wheel!—to be the national flag. That must be prevented. Gandhi will push Hindustani again as the national language too."

"All is not lost, Tatyarao; all is not lost."

As Keshu wheeled Savarkar around the garden, he could hear him muttering to himself every so often, "I must get better; I *must*!"

It gladdened his heart.

At teatime, Savarkar put a detaining hand on Keshu's arm as he went to lift the teacup.

"Let me, Keshu," he said firmly.

He held the ear of the cup in one hand. It shook a bit, so he steadied the cup with his other hand, too, and slowly carried it to his lips. It took a while to finish the whole cup, but not a drop did he spill. They looked triumphantly at each other.

"Mind over body, Keshu, mind over body. I must *make* myself do things. Drifting along miserably is not my way, is it?"

"No, it certainly isn't!" said Keshu fervently. "I can still remember your words in Andaman. My life depended on them."

"We have survived so much. I have been thinking. I must—no, no, I *will* get better!"

"I have no doubt of it! Now, Tatyarao, I have a game for you," said Keshu.

"A game!" exclaimed Savarkar.

"Yes! I will quote a line of your poem, and you must tell me the line before and after it."

"You expect me not to know it, Keshu?" challenged Savarkar.

"I wouldn't dare think such a thing, Tatyarao, but we'll see, shall we? Here goes: let my eyes have their fill of Him, please, oh please."

"Hmm," said Savarkar, rubbing his forehead and thinking. "This line is from *Permit Me to See My God in the Temple.* It is a plea from the heart of an ex-untouchable, begging the Caste Hindus permission for temple entry. I cried when I wrote that. Let me see-e-e, the other lines are . . . give me a moment . . . yes . . . yes!

To see my God in his temple
Allow me, I beseech.
Let my eyes have their fill of Him,
Please, oh please.
Defiled my hands are cleaning
Your filth night and day,[80]
To cleanse them in the Pure heart,
Allow me, I pray.
I am but the body, He its life,
I am the thirst only He can sate.
I am the Wretched, He the Compassionate,
O let me fall at His feet, prostrate.
I am His devotee, He my Lord,
I am a Hindu, He my Hindu God.

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80 It was the job of the "untouchables" not only to clean out the toilets but also carry away the waste in the days before flushing and sewage systems.

O Fellow Hindu brothers,
Bar not, beg I, my way to my God!

"There! I quoted the whole poem!" said Savarkar, triumphantly. "Now what's next?"

* * *

From that day on, Savarkar's recovery was on an upward graph. Every day, there was some success, small though it may be. By April 1 he had recovered completely! They all moved to Poona, to Seth Gulabchand's home in Chaturshringi at first, then to the Poona Hotel. This was a buffer period, a period of recuperation—no public appearances, no politics. But he now met close friends and associates. He also went on touristic trips, for the *first* time in the sixty-three years of his life! Gajanan and Keshu took time off, now and then. Keshu visited his uncle. Lakshmi had resigned from her job and lived there while Keshu was away. Savarkar fell seriously ill of suspected cholera but recovered. This left a legacy of recurring fever for a long, long time to come. All in all, time flew by on wings, and before they knew it, it was the first week of August and they were back in Bombay.

The political situation, all this time, had been brewing to a boiling point and was on the threshold of doom, disaster, and a horrendous civil war.

Chapter Sixteen

August 1946-June 1947

After the elections, Atlee sent three of his cabinet ministers from London to sort out the Indian political mess. The need was pressing. The Indian navy had revolted; the army, too, had refused to follow orders at times. Britain had managed—*just*—to curb them, but she needed to get out of India, *fast*! The wrangling and squabbling between the British, Congress, and Muslim League commenced.

An agreement being impossible, the Cabinet Mission announced a plan: formation of a Union of India, embracing all the provinces and Princely States, which would deal with the foreign affairs, defense, and communications along with the power to raise the finances required for them; provinces to be divided into three sections—effectively representing what could be West Pakistan, Hindustan, and East Pakistan; a provincial autonomy to be established by vesting all other subjects and residuary powers in the provinces; a Constituent Assembly to be formed to map out the constitution of free India; and an Interim Government to be formed immediately for the day-to-day running of the country in the transition period, while a permanent deal was negotiated with Britain.

Both parties after a spate of objections and qualifications agreed to go ahead, with reservations, accepting the spirit of the plan. Jinnah put his Pakistan demand aside . . . ! A tenuous,

very tenuous, agreement had been reached. There was great hope of saving the integrity of India!

At this very, *very* delicate juncture in the politics of India, Nehru came out with *very* unwise—to express it kindly—statements in a press conference. He admitted: that in agreeing to Wavell's plan, Congress had done nothing more than start a process; they were not bound by any provisos regarding minorities; there was no certainty about grouping of the sections; and the union would have more say in the running of the provinces than was suggested by the Mission.

In effect, he publicly refuted the spirit of the Mission's plan in toto . . . ! *What* was the purpose of this move by the Congress leaders? Smashing the hopes of an undivided, United India? Surely they weren't naïve enough to imagine that Jinnah would acquiesce meekly to this!

Even so, Jinnah did not immediately break the tenuous bond of agreement; he approached Wavell and sought an assurance that Britain would provide a guarantee against the treachery of Congress. Wavell was unable to do any such thing. On July 27 the Muslim League opted out of the Mission's plan. Declaring that their goal for a Pakistan was back on the table, they announced a policy of "Direct Action" to reach it.

The brutality of Genghis Khan would not be a patch on them as they wreaked vengeance upon the Hindus, they promised!

And indeed, they lived up to their word—while the Viceroy, Nehru, and Gandhi lifted not a finger, official or otherwise, to protect the helpless Hindus.

August 16: A public holiday was declared in Calcutta in honor of Direct Action. At 2:00 p.m., Chief Minister Huseyn Suhrawady was making a fiery speech promoting Direct Action to a crowd about a hundred thousand strong. Caltutta was the Jewel of Bengal—the very economy of Bengal depended on her. An East Pakistan without Calcutta—even though of Hindu majority—was inconceivable to the League. It was essential to stake a claim. The local government was Muslim. The police

force, too, was largely Muslim. The Hindus were cowards, rendered impotent by Gandhi's nonviolence—so believed the Muslims, from their experience of years of rioting.

Terrorizing Calcutta was bound to be a cinch!

Muslim mobs armed with weapons, lathis, brickbats, and bottles, descended upon the hapless Hindus—in their homes, in their place of business, on the streets—and gave them a choice: be burned alive inside the buildings or come out and be slaughtered. Screams of terror and pain rang out; streets were filled with mutilated bodies; Hindu homes were invaded; women were raped; flames of fire danced in the backdrop of this murderous scene; and clouds of smoke filled the air.

An immediate report was dispatched to Delhi—but Wavell and the Congress High Command, busy ironing out details to swear in the Interim Government, made no move . . . ! The Calcutta police showed no inclination to take action; Suhrawady stationed himself in the Police Control room, hampering what little action they might have taken. It became crystal clear to the Hindus of Calcutta that they were on their own. In defense of their lives, their homes, and their country, the Hindus picked up arms and entered the battlefield—for survival.

Now, there were quite as many, if not more, Muslim victims as there were Hindus. *Now* the police took notice. *Now* Wavell sent out the army. Some measure of peace was restored by August 22.

Wavell himself made a flying visit to Calcutta—to give comfort and assurance to the victims? Evidently not! He met with the leaders of the Muslim League to gauge their intentions and returned to Delhi forthwith, convinced that the Muslim League was bent on traveling this path of murder and mayhem to get what they wanted. From here on, Wavell lined himself up squarely with the Muslim League and followed a policy of browbeating the Congress into giving concessions.

The Direct Action resulted in riots in several places all over India. What action did the Government take to squash it? *None!* Neither the Viceroy nor the Congress leaders even *ask*

that the movement to be called off. Indeed, even the Bengal government, so implicitly involved in the rioting, was not dissolved!

The League leaders continued with their vituperation against the Hindus, their press continued to incite the Muslims, and the Muslims continued the rioting, killing, and raping—and as a reward for all this the Muslim League was allowed to take their seats in the Interim Government, even as they declared that they were doing so only to hamper the administration of the country.

Hindus were desperate—their life and property was in danger, their homeland was in danger, and the Congress leaders whom they had elected to power with such hopes and aspirations did *nothing* to ensure their safety. No one—not the British, nor the Congress leaders, and certainly not the League—*felt* the pain of the Hindus! *Should* the leaders of the nation sit back and watch such butchery, unmoved? *Surely* the loss of even one life should be regretted, should be avoided? What to say, when so many are getting slaughtered?

Gandhi outdid himself in callousness—he *still* advised the Hindus not to defend themselves but to gratify the Muslim need for murder and mayhem by sacrificing so many Hindu lives that the Muslims would be replete . . . ! Just *how* many Hindu lives would have to be sacrificed on the altar of Gandhi's nonviolence? The hundreds and thousands of Hindus sacrificed till today were not enough?

But the League leaders had realized that Hindus were breaking free of the shackles of nonviolence that bound them. Their defense of themselves resulted in a loss of Muslim life. Something more drastic would have to be done!

Noakhali, October 10—an auspicious day of Hindu festival: Golam Sarwar, a member of a *pious* Muslim family revered by Muslims and Hindus, mobilized his private army, the Miyar Fauj, setting it loose upon the innocent Hindus busy celebrating and worshiping their gods. In the Sahapur market, he was joined by League leader Kasem and his army,

the Kasemer Fauj. The shrine of the Hindu Goddess Kali was desecrated, and the familiar pattern of murder and mayhem was embarked upon.

Surendranath Basu, a government servant, was critically wounded by vicious stabbing, tied hand and foot, and burned alive. Rajkumar Pal, a doctor on a mission of mercy to help the wounded, was slaughtered on his way. The Muslim public joined these trained private armies. The violence spread to an area covering three hundred square miles strategically selected. The roads and rails were destroyed and canals blocked to prevent help from coming in. The Hindu minority in this area was at the *merciless* mercy of the ravening Muslims!

Rajendra Lal Chowdhury, president of the Noakhali Hindu Sabha, rushed to his terrace. *Dear God,* he thought, *what a mob!* A horde of Muslims, armed and yelling slogans of Pakistan, was headed straight to his home. Fortunately, they had arms and ammunition to defend themselves.

"Hurry up, everyone, take positions on the roof!" he yelled to the men in the house. "Lock up the house!"

Shutters were brought down, women and children took positions of safety in the center of the big house, and the men, crouching low before the roof wall kept the mob at bay, firing all day from their guns from the decorative openings in the roof wall. The mob retired for the night. The next day, twenty-two members of Chowdhury's family were slaughtered, his daughters taken captive, and the house gutted. His severed head was gifted to Golam Sarwar.

The Muslim mob strained at the shutters to break entry into Chittaranjan Raychaudhuri's home. He and his family members had sought safety on the roof. Raychaudhuri had one gun and limited ammunition. What protection could it give? The pounding was getting wilder—there was no time to be lost.

Picking up his gun, he said, "Forgive me, my dears, forgive me . . . . There is no other choice!"

His grandmother, putting her arms around the children, replied stoically, "Hurry up, son, hurry up! Our honor must be saved! There is no time to be lost!"

Raychaudhuri, willing his hand not to falter, held his gun to the forehead of his family members, one by one, and pulled the trigger. When the roof door shattered open, none but he was left standing. The next instant, his brains spattered on the floor.

Dutt and his wife, clutching their kids, wondered desperately: *What to do? What to do?* The wild crowd was almost upon them.

"Let us hide in the rushes! Quickly!" Dutt shouted, pulling his family toward the river.

"No, no!" panted his wife. "There is no time—we must save the kids. But how?" She looked wildly around.

"There, there!" she cried, pointing to a pile of slats awaiting disposal in the corner of the yard. There was just enough gap for the two kids, eight and six years of age, to squeeze in.

"My babies, crawl in, *please*!" She pushed them into the space. "Don't come out, no matter what, do—not—come—out!"

"Ama, Ama, what is going on? *Ama!*" they cried out as their mother pried her fingers out of their clasp.

Dutt and his wife were on the other side of the yard when the violent mob fell upon them.

"Please," cried Dutt, clutching his wife close, "take what you want! Spare our lives!"

"Ha!" cried the leader, looking very frightening with red, bloodshot eyes. He held a fishing spear in one hand and a lighted torch in the other. "This land is *our* Pakistan! No Hindus allowed here! You love your wife? You may die together."

The two terrified children watched as the crowd forcibly tied their parents and set first them, then their house on fire. Oh, the *screams* . . . ! Oh, the roar of the fire . . . ! Helplessly, they watched—huddling in their tiny crevice, tears suspended in their eyes, hands squeezed tightly over their mouths.

The mob left in the direction of the river shouting whoops of victory. They were on the hunt for more victims—certainly many must have taken refuge in the rushes at the river bank!

The two children sat frozen with terror. What should they *do*? Were their parents *dead*? *No . . . no . . . Ama . . . Ama . . . !* Oh—was that their mother *moving*? Or was it their *father*? Hard to tell, so badly burned were the bodies, but one was still alive—and writhing in pain. The two frightened children crawled out of safety. It was unbearable to witness their parent's pain. What could they do? Their home was smoldering. Perhaps water from the river . . . ? They rushed blindly to the river, their mother's words of warning completely forgotten.

A horrific scene was being enacted on the river bank. Many people had fled to the river for safety. Surely, *surely* the thick rushes would hide their presence . . . if they crouched low, very low, in the water? But the Muslims had an answer to everything. They stabbed the rushes wildly with their fishing spears. Pools of blood welled to the surface until one pool joined the other. Only then were they satisfied! They turned to leave and spotted the two innocents. Without any compunction, one man lifted his spear, still dripping blood from his other victims, and speared first one child, then the other to the ground.

In a police station, the inspector reclined calmly on his chair, feet on the table. Screams of terror, the slogans of Pakistan, the roar of the fire, all reached his ears. The smell of blood and death, too, had permeated the police station. He laughed to himself.

"Saab, Saab," cried a constable rushing into his room, "there is a crowd coming here."

The inspector was intrigued. He snapped his feet to the floor. "Let me see!"

He moved ponderously to the door and gaped. "Oy, what a treat!" he cried, rubbing his hands together gleefully—what a treat indeed!

Hindu women and girls stripped of every stitch of clothes and jewelry—stripped of their modesty, dignity, and honor—were

being marched along the road toward the police station. The blood of their slaughtered menfolk, mingling with their own, was spattered on their bare skin. They were being ushered along like cattle—poked, prodded, and groped. Any protest they made, any movement to cover themselves, brought more humiliation upon them; yet there was more to come—gang rape and a vicious death, coming sooner for some, later for others. Death, vicious though it may be, was *still* a merciful release.

Noakhali was a living hell for Hindus.

When this reign of terror—of murder, mayhem, rape and forcible conversions to Islam—began, Chief Minister Huseyn Suhrawady and his secretary were, very conveniently, vacationing away from Bengal.

October 28: Gandhi left Delhi for his tour of Bengal after concluding, so he said, "his important work"—the swearing in of the Muslim League into the Interim Government . . . ? In Calcutta his nonviolent soul *warmly* welcomed the perpetrators of this horrendous violence, the League leaders! Did he even ask them to desist? Did he administer to them the mildest of reproofs? *No!* He claimed them as brothers, expressing a wish to enjoy their hospitality.

Then, spouting advice of nonviolence to the Hindus, the Mahatma set off on November 6—almost a month after the onset of the reign of terror, *after* the worst of its fury—on his journey of mercy to Noakhali to apply mere Band-Aids to the gaping, bleeding wounds of the Hindus. *His* safety was assured not only by an Armed Guard but also a volunteer Sikh group . . . ! *He* was the Mahatma; of course, Gandhi was obliged to sacrifice his "staunch" principle of nonviolence to save *his* own valuable skin. The Hindu common man now—of what value was his life? *He* was a mere statistic!

In Noakhali, under the very nose of Gandhi and his relief workers, incidents of rape and violence were perpetrated upon the Hindus! Had the Mahatma, the undisputed leader of Congress, *no* power to prevent the atrocities committed

in his presence? He had no protest, no consequence, to offer the Muslim police who brushed off petitions and encouraged violence? He could not ensure that the relief volunteers sporting the Red Cross badges were not the violent aggressors themselves? Could he not spare *one* armed guard from his *enormous* armed entourage, to protect the devastated Hindus? Evidently *not*!

Unable to bear both, the horror of the League violence perpetrated upon their brethren in Bengal and the lack of response from the Congress and the Viceroy in protecting them, Hindus in the neighboring Bihar went berserk. They indulged in a spree of violence, matching that of the Muslim League, against the Muslim minority living there. But the Government response was drastically different. Nehru and Wavell rushed to Bihar to control the Hindus. Nehru made aerial tours, threatening to throw bombs and open firing into Hindu crowds if they did not desist. And Gandhi brought out his ultimate weapon—he went on a fast, not to be broken until the Hindus in Bihar stopped the violence. This government policy of reprisals for the Hindus *only* caused an uproar in the media. Even the Congress press was moved to protest: "If Nehru's body must fall, it must fall in Noakhali. If Gandhi must fast, he must fast for Noakhali. Justice for Noakhali!"

It all fell on deaf government ears.

India was afire, her people in dire, dire straits, and in middle of this crisis, their Mahatma once more indulged in sexual "experiments" of a perverse nature. At the age of seventy-seven—*while in Noakhali on his mission of mercy*—he "slept" naked in the arms of his naked *teenage grandniece*, Manu, behind closed doors! She was his personal attendant and gave him his daily bath with massage—among other things.

This scandal threatened to erupt; indeed, Gandhi shamelessly wanted to make a public statement of the "purity" of his sexual predilection for young girls. What was so offensive, he declared, he had been doing such "experiments" for fifty years now . . . !

1947

Muslim League violence had now commenced in Punjab and Sind, with massive rioting in Rawalpindi. Atlee, fed up and afraid of where the Indian situation was headed, made two bold moves—he declared June 1948 as the time of departure of the British from India and recalled Wavell, so obviously ineffective, sending Lord Louis Mountbatten as the Viceroy of India in his stead.

Lord Louis Mountbatten—charming, debonair, with the natural arrogance of centuries of royal blood bred in him—exuded a genuine warmth and fondness for all Asians and a true belief in their right to freedom. He arrived in Delhi on Saturday, March 22, armed with two special concessions from Atlee: an almost complete freedom to handle the Indian situation as he saw fit, and an extended personal staff hand-picked by him to aid him in this complex job. Within a short time, Lord and Lady Mountbatten had won over the hearts of many Indian leaders; most of the Princes were their personal friends too. Mountbatten had intensive meetings with all of them.

The internal situation was volatile. Violence was breaking out all over India, especially in Bengal, and Punjab was a ticking bomb. For Mountbatten, who had first and foremost to consider Britain's position, there was only one choice to be made: partition.

India was to be divided into two separate Sovereign States and all the 562 Princely States would be compelled to join one or the other. It was a considerable undertaking—given the penchant of the Indian leaders and Princes to argue and nitpick in circles, endlessly avoiding decisions. Even so, Mountbatten drastically brought forward the day of Britain's final exit from India to August 15, 1947! The decision made, he only had to get everyone to accept it. He hadn't any doubt in his abilities. Nehru might expostulate but usually acquiesced in the end—the two real mischief-makers were Jinnah and Gandhi.

In the case of Jinnah, Mountbatten was armed with special words of persuasion from Churchill, given to him in London when he was getting his plan for India passed at double speed in the Parliament. Apparently, Churchill and Jinnah had been in secret communication for years . . . ! Churchill's message to Jinnah was: "This is a matter of life and death for Pakistan, if you do not accept this offer with both hands." Indeed, these words worked like a charm in persuading Jinnah. As an added guarantee, Mountbatten, being aware of Jinnah's *dislike* of actually making any commitment, told Jinnah that his silence would be sufficient agreement when he announced the plan!

Gandhi was a little more difficult to handle. Despite the fact that Gandhi had many times, over the years, declared that he was *for* the formation of Pakistan, it wasn't beyond the bounds of possibility that he would be moved to make disruptive statements against partition and inflame the Indian public. His whole career was dotted with such moves, but Mountbatten had his measure! When Gandhi arrived for their meeting, Mountbatten without much preamble emptied the butter-boat over him: The Mountbatten Plan was a misnomer, it should more rightly be called "the Gandhi Plan." In all sincerity, he, Mountbatten, had only incorporated Gandhi's own concepts of noncoercion, self-determination, the earliest possible date of British departure, and sympathetic views about dominion status.

Gandhi's overweening vanity lapped it all up! No trouble did he make.

By June 3, Mountbatten got everyone to acquiesce unanimously to his plan by the sheer force of his personality. In the mere seventy-two days they had at their disposal, a mountain of work had to be done and enormous decisions had to be made. No one had time or thought to argue. For the sake of expediency, a Radcliffe commission was established to determine the borders on the basis of religion. The chairman of this commission, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, was an old friend of Mountbatten's and had also been a junior in Jinnah's practice in

London. Both India and Pakistan agreed to abide by the Award declared by this commission. That nothing should sabotage this plan, Mountbatten determined to himself to disclose the Award on August 16, *after* independence.

Working round the clock, the various details were getting sorted out. Mountbatten and Sardar set forth on a campaign of charming, browbeating, or wheedling—basically doing whatever it took—to convince the Princes to accede to India or Pakistan. They were successful with all but three States—Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagadh. This was a major victory, a feather in Mountbatten's cap!

Finally, after nine long months, Jinnah called off the Direct Action Movement! But the damage was done. For almost a year, India was practically in a state of civil war—only the Government didn't admit to it! Order and peace were barely being maintained *now*, before independence—what chance was there of it in the turmoil immediately after? *What* was to happen to the people of India? How was the inevitable partition of Bengal and Punjab to be carried out peacefully? What arrangements would be made to ensure peace and order? Not many! In all the preparations, this one aspect was conspicuously missing. The *people* of India were left to their own mercies!

Chapter Seventeen

June-August 1947

June 6: At nine o'clock in the evening, Keshu perched on his armchair. His soul was very restless. Mountbatten had exercised his authority; the British *were* setting their Mother free—but by ripping her asunder to give birth to Pakistan.

"We had no choice, no choice at all!" the Congress leaders were wailing to the Indians. "We accepted Partition to prevent bloodshed!"

Prevent bloodshed . . . ! Abruptly Keshu stood up, raking his hand wildly through his hair. Stoutly denying that rivers of blood were flowing in Hindustan was *not* "preventing bloodshed"! Pakistan was granted to the Muslims, and *still* their violence didn't stop. Now they were fighting for a bigger chunk of Hindustan—the whole of Punjab, the whole of Bengal, North West Frontier Province, Assam. Where was it going to end? Till Hindustan was no more and there was only Pakistan?

"Lakshmi," said Keshu abruptly, "come! Let's walk to the beach."

Lakshmi was sitting on a couch nearby with an open book on her lap. Reading had been impossible. She was worriedly watching the play of emotions—the writhing of his tortured soul—on Keshu's face. At forty-eight, he was still fit and strong, but his hair had turned gray, his forehead was carved with deep lines, and his eyes were always full of pain.

"Keshu, is it safe?" The words had popped out involuntarily.

Keshu gave a bitter laugh. "Yes, this is what life has come to—we have to wonder if we will get a knife in the back every time we step out."

"It is dark out now. If it isn't the Muslims, it could be the police! Ever since they came into the house and took you to prison, I worry." Two tears rolled down her cheeks.

Keshu quickly sat next to her on the couch and held her close.

"*That* was bound to happen! Tatyarao is urging the Hindus to defend themselves, to pick up arms against attack. The Government, police, army—*no one* is defending the Hindus. In fact Gandhi and Nehru are still preaching nonviolence to them and to that end are coming down hard on the Hindu leaders, press, and people. The police here were bound to come to Savarkar Sadan and make an example of us. They couldn't make any charge stick."

"But what about the next time? I don't trust these police an inch!"

"Neither do I, Lakshmi, but we must do our duty." He looked deep in her eyes. He didn't want to add to her worry needlessly. "Perhaps we can go in the garden? I do need a breath of fresh air."

The air was balmy and peaceful in the garden. "Keshu, it makes me feel quite guilty to be so comfortable when so many are in hell," said Lakshmi, taking a deep breath. "*Why* is Nehru is so much against the Hindus?"

"What can I say, Lakshmi? Perhaps down the road, when this is history, someone will try to make sense of Nehru and Gandhi—*I* can't! To sacrifice countless human lives to uphold a principle; to sacrifice one's country for power and politics—*that* is beyond me."

"Thank God Sardar's eyes have opened—not that he can do much officially, looks like," said Lakshmi regretfully.

"Yes, there is some hope; he is openly telling the Hindus that they *must* defend themselves. Gandhi is furious and has

pulled him up. But Sardar has heard that the Muslims want to take over Delhi."

"Delhi . . . ! But . . . that will mean the end of Hindustan!" cried Lakshmi.

"Yes. It is a great source of worry. Tatyarao—" Keshu fell silent and then added, "He feels desperate. I am very worried about him too."

"He must feel so helpless—his health is still weak, so prone to fevers and needs sleeping pills to sleep. He has retired from active politics, hardly stirs out of the house, in fact. But he stills writes encouraging words to the Hindus, keeps in communication with other leaders and even the Government."

"Yes! He has sent a letter out to the Congress leaders asking them to hand over authority to more able hands that can save our people and our country."

"Oooh, that will make him even more unpopular with Nehru! Sometimes I think that if Nehru could have Tatyarao disappear . . ."

"Perish the thought, Lakshmi! Don't put it in words!" said Keshu, shuddering. "We have enough on our plate right now. Tatyarao, at the moment, is having a difficult private interview with Nathuram."

"Difficult? But why?" exclaimed Lakshmi.

Keshu shook his head. "Never mind, Lakshmi, let us stroll a little."

In his office, Savarkar sat facing Nathuram. Here was his staunch supporter, one of exemplary character, very passionately devoted to eradicating the inequities in Hindu society and to the cause of United India. He had shouldered tremendous responsibility for the cause. The horrendous situation in India today, the plight of the Hindus, had filled him—all of them—with anguish and desperation.

"Nathuram," said Savarkar quietly, "I read the report about your heckling of Gandhi's prayer meeting."

"You should have seen the way he took to his heels in fright and whisked himself behind guards and a locked door! So much

for his advice to *others* about facing the opponent fearlessly!" Nathuram laughed.

"That behavior did not behoove you, Nathuram."

"Tatyarao," said Nathuram, taken aback, "Gandhi dared to force the reading of the Koran upon the devotees in his prayer meeting—in a *temple*—despite their protests! Would he dare read our Gita in the mosque?"

"Did that give you the right to disrupt the prayer and make threats?" asked Savarkar, still quiet.

"Tatyarao! Just how much injustice should we take? *Enough* of his unequal treatment of Hindus and Muslims! I have great respect for all religions but utterly denounce Gandhi's tactics."

"Nathuram, this is a critical time for us. You cannot go half-cocked and haywire. Now we have a constitution of *our* free country to follow. Behaving like a ruffian is not acceptable."

"A ruffian—*me*!" exclaimed Nathuram, shocked. "Gandhi considers himself above the law! I blame him for our desperate situation today."

"You may protest against his tactics by holding meetings. But I cannot condone undemocratic behavior!"

"Meetings . . . ! Tatyarao, tell me, must I hold meetings to protest against his injustice too? He has befriended Suhrawady—*Suhrawady!*—who is responsible for the killing of so many! 'Shahidbhai' he calls him; it means a 'Martyred Soul'—martyr to *what*?"

"But, Nathuram," expostulated Savarkar, "*Shahid* is Suhrawady's name!"

"Why should Gandhi use his second name with that significant meaning? Why not call him by his first name, Huseyn? No! I suspect his motives. East Bengal has been practically emptied of Hindus and Gandhi turns a blind eye!"

"Yes, Nathuram, the plight of Hindus and Hindustan pains my heart too. We must build a strong political party—get a say-so in the Government."

"I don't accept the Congress government as the Government of *our* country! It is the enemy of Hindustan!"

"No, Nathuram," said Savarkar firmly, "Congress was elected by the people of Hindustan. Their Government *is* our Government! You *must* accept that."

Nathuram opened his mouth to speak and then shut it with a snap. After a moment he said, "Tatyarao, I have great respect for you, but I must follow the conviction of my heart."

"Very well, Nathuram, then let your heart be guided by your head. Hindus need leaders of strength, people like you to work for their benefit. Do not throw it all away. The country is always, *always* above the individual. Don't forget."

Shortly after, Nathuram left. Savarkar watched him leave with troubled eyes.

June 16: Savarkar was with Gajanan and Keshu in his room.

"Tatyarao," said Gajanan, "today's *Times of India* gives the whole proceeding of the All India Congress Committee meeting on the fourteenth!"

"Hmm, I did read it."

"Gandhi told the members that either they accept Mountbatten's plan or get rid of all the old leaders!"

"What a choice! Will they *ever* dare to get rid of *Gandhi*? Do they even dare to have a thought *not* dictated by him?" exclaimed Keshu.

"They had better!" said Savarkar grimly. "Gandhi's principle of nonviolence and his anti-technology approach cannot run a country!"

"Hasn't he learned anything the past few months?" said Gajanan.

"Nothing at all!" cried Keshu. "Having partitioned off our motherland without a qualm, he is now saying that partitioning of Bengal will be a tragedy!"

"Hindu areas of Bengal, Punjab, and Sind *must* belong to Hindustan," said Savarkar emphatically. "Can you imagine what havoc Pakistan will wreck on those innocents?" It was a horrendous reality to contemplate. "They have staked a claim to parts of Hindustan on the basis of their majority there—they *cannot* expect to get Hindu majority areas into Pakistan too!"

"Fortunately, Nehru and Sardar are determined to keep the Hindu areas in India! But Gandhi—" Keshu slammed a fist into his other hand "—he is our nemesis!"

"After becoming bosom buddy with Suhrawady, he is selling the idea of an independent Bengal to the Bengalis—and some Bengali Hindus are falling for it too!" Gajanan shook his head regretfully. "They don't learn either. It should be crystal clear to them by now that as soon as Bengal separates from Hindustan, in two shakes of a tail it will become a Muslim State and Hindus there will be exterminated or converted!"

"Gullible, naïve Hindus!" muttered Savarkar. "Gajanan, where are the letters I received from Maharaja Hari Singh[81] and Ramaswami Aiyar?"[82]

"Here they are, Tatyarao," said Gajanan, digging them out from a pile of letters by his side and handing them to Savarkar. "They are determined to remain independent. They want to know your opinion."

"Here are my drafted replies, Gajanan," said Savarkar. "I have told them they have my full support in this decision—and they must immediately start building up an extremely strong army."

Gajanan gaped.

Keshu blurted out, "But, Tatyarao . . . is that wise?"

Savarkar was silent for a long moment. Then he looked up. Tears were glinting in his eyes.

"Picture this scene, Keshu, Gajanan. Do you really think that the Muslims who are so aggressively mowing down the Hindus *now* are going to just stop after independence? No! Pakistan will surely attack Hindustan and try to take over as much of our country as they can. If they reach Delhi, we are lost! And don't forget, the Nizam's land is a sizeable chunk smack in the middle of our Hindustan. He is panting for an Islamic State in Hyderabad and looking for a way to accede to

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81 Maharaja of Kashmir.

82 C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Chief Minister of the State of Travancore.

Pakistan"—the tears rolled down his cheeks—"what faith can we place in our Government? They have proved themselves to be biased, incompetent, and heartless! Do you have faith that they will defend our country? Can we take that chance?"

"But, Tatyarao, an independent Kashmir and Travancore compromises the integrity of Hindustan, doesn't it?" cried Keshu.

"Times are desperate, Keshu—*desperate*! It calls for desperate measures. Mountbatten is pushing the Maharaja of Kashmir to join Pakistan; that cannot be permitted! Our roots are in the Himalayas of Kashmir; they are our natural protection from enemies. If we have Kashmir as a strong independent Hindu state in the north—just like Nepal—and Travancore in the south, we will have armies to count on when Pakistan attacks. Otherwise, if Gandhi does actually dismantle our army, as he is advocating, Hindustan will be a sitting duck!" He fell silent.

"Tatyarao, surely, surely the Government of India won't be so idiotic!" cried Gajanan.

"A Pakistan taking over Hindustan is . . . is . . ."

"Yes, Keshu," said Savarkar, "a horrendous thought to even put in words but *not* an impossibility!"

A few days later, Ramaswami Aiyar was attacked by a Christian; fortunately he survived. He resigned from his post, and Maharaja Chithira Thirunal Bala of Travancore acceded to India. The Maharaja of Kashmir managed to hold out and remain independent.

Independence Day was fast approaching. Decisions were being made speedily. Nehru was to be the first Prime Minister of India and Sardar Patel the Home Minister. Mountbatten, most unwisely for both India and himself, accepted the post of Governor General of India. Jinnah appointed Liaquat Ali Khan as Prime Minister of Pakistan and chose to be its Governor General himself.

In Delhi, a committee was established to choose the national flag of India. Savarkar had given this deep thought. There wasn't

any way the Congress was going to accept the Pan-Hindu flag, but it was imperative that the Congress flag with the spinning wheel—positively a symbol of regression—should not be palmed off as the flag of India. The tri-colors of the flag were acceptable; indeed, his own flag design of 1907 was tri-color. Ingeniously, he came up with the idea to replace the spinning wheel with the "Dharma Chakra"—the Wheel of Law, representing Buddha's pathway to enlightenment. Immediately he dashed off a letter to the Flag Committee, and to his immense satisfaction, on July 22 the offensive spinning wheel was outvoted in favor of the Dharma Chakra.

It was a small but very pertinent victory—all hope was not dead! However, many Hindu Mahasabha members were highly displeased with this flag; nothing except a Pan-Hindu flag would do for them. But Savarkar, Keshu, and Gajanan rejoiced.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, "how happy we are to have a national flag that does not make our head droop in shame!"

"Hindu leaders have not completely become puppets in the hands of Gandhi!" said Savarkar.

"Tatyarao," said Gajanan, gleefully, "he is raging and ranting against the flag in his paper, *Harijan*. The dropping of the spinning wheel signals the beginning of the end of Gandhi's rule, and he can't take it! He has declared that he will not show respect to the flag of India."

"That is *very* small-minded of him," said Savarkar. "In a democratic country, we have to accept what is voted in—but then what does the Mahatma know of democracy?"

"It is shameful for him to be throwing a tantrum over this . . . !" declared Keshu. "He refuses to unfurl the flag on Independence Day and is opting out of the celebrations altogether!"

"Well, that is certainly a shabby reason for opting out of the celebrations, but a lot of fanfare when so many of our people are suffering is very unseemly too."

"Tatyarao, why has the Government not invited you to the celebrations? Nehru must honor you and, in fact, return all of your property confiscated by the British," said Gajanan.

"Such things are not important to me, Gajanan. I have never done anything for recognition or popularity or gain."

"But surely it doesn't reflect well on Nehru," put in Keshu, "to be seen nursing so much animosity toward you! Should not the prime minister of a country look beyond his own petty feelings and think nationally?"

"If Nehru could look past his own petty feelings, would Hindustan be suffering today, Keshu?" asked Savarkar wryly.

"There is that, Tatyarao," agreed Keshu. "Come to think of it—how did the flag slip through the Gandhi-Nehru fingers? They managed to axe the name 'Hindustan.' Officially Hindustan is now 'Bharat.' Muslims have their Pakistan, but Hindus may not have their Hindustan! *Tcha!*"

"Try as they will, they will not succeed in erasing the name Hindustan from the Land of the Hindus . . . and the same, I predict, will be the case of our freedom song, *Vande Mataram*," avowed Savarkar.

"They did not reinstate its honor by making it our national anthem," said Gajanan sadly.

"Even so, for years and years it will thrill the Indian hearts as *the* patriotic song of India!" declared Savarkar. "A song that inspired so many to fight for freedom cannot be wiped out by the will of any mean-spirited leaders!"

They saluted the song with a few minutes of silence.

Savarkar broke the silence. "Shyamaprasad called seeking my permission—which I gave willingly. Nehru has offered him a seat in the Cabinet."

"Tatyarao," said Keshu warmly, "there is no one quite like you, anywhere—I'm *sure*!"

"What do you mean, Keshu?" asked Savarkar, surprised.

"After the debacle of Dr. Shyamaprasad and the elections, you *still* do not hold a grudge against him, Tatyarao."

"Keshu, we *need* Hindutva-minded cabinet ministers. It is inconceivable to me to let *anything* come in the way of the good of my country—never mind nursing grudges!"

"Tatyarao, that is what makes you remarkable!" exclaimed Keshu.

Savarkar patted his shoulder. "Either of you heard from Nathuram?"

"Not lately, Tatyarao," said Gajanan. "But he and Apte are going to escort you to Delhi for the HM meeting."

"Hmmm . . ."

"Anything the matter, Tatyarao?" asked Keshu quickly.

"No-o-o, Keshu," replied Savarkar hesitantly, before changing the subject. "How is our work for protecting the Hindus coming along? Are the Hindu travelers getting proper escorts through sensitive areas? Is there protection provided for people living near Muslim majority sections?"

"Yes, Tatyarao," replied Gajanan and proceeded to give him the report.

* * *

In Punjab, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh societies were intermingled all over, though West Punjab had a marginal Muslim majority. The Sikhs faced a dilemma. They did not want to belong to Pakistan; they had no expectation of tolerance and welcome from the Muslims. But Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, their founder, was in West Punjab—definitely destined to be Pakistan. The situation was *tense*. Three organizations here were ready to mobilize at the drop of a hat—the Muslim League National Guard, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and the Sikh private army. In desperation, the Governor of Punjab banned the Muslim League National Guard and the RSS, and pleaded with the Sikh leaders to maintain peace. But incidents of violence occurred nevertheless.

August 9: The Pakistan Express, relocating Pakistani Government officials and their families to West Punjab, was

derailed with a mine. The culprits disappeared into the Sikh State of Faridkot. One woman and a child were killed.

August 11: The news leaked out that much of the Muslim majority area of Gurdaspur, with its highway access to Kashmir, was given to Hindustan. The Muslim wrath overflowed. In Lahore, fifteen Sikhs were killed in a gurdwara. Reports said the police connived at this incident.

August 12: The Sind Express pulled up in Lahore station—with a *trainload* of brutally massacred, mangled Hindu and Sikh *corpses*; no one—man, woman, or child—was spared. Passengers of the Frontier Mail were butchered near Wagah.

By the next day no Hindu or Sikh arrived in Lahore alive. Rioting broke out in the city. Lahore went up in flames. There was a massive retaliation from the Sikhs and Hindus. Violence spread rapidly all over Punjab and Sind. Now, trainloads of corpses were going both ways—all this even before the dawn of August 15, Independence Day.

August 15: Even as Delhi rejoiced wildly in celebration of independence, the refugees were pouring in. People, with horror stories of being driven out of their home and land empty-handed, stretched their arms out for succor—but there was none to be had. Delhi and the Government were just not ready for this. The refugees vented their rage, frustration, and hopelessness on the Muslims. Terror and chaos reigned in Delhi.

As the clock struck the hour of midnight on August 15, a solemn group—Savarkar, Mai, Vishwas, Narayanrao and family, Keshu, Lakshmi, and Gajanan—walked up the staircase to the roof. All the lights were on. Savarkar was in the lead holding the national flag of India in one hand and the Pan-Hindu flag of United India, which was not to be, in the other. Tears of joy for winning freedom mingled with tears of sorrow as they rolled down his cheeks—sorrow for the partition of their motherland, for the violence and destruction that was rife everywhere. He waved the flags before fitting them, side by side, into two

specially fixed rings. They all pronounced, "Victory to Mother India!" and "Vande Mataram!" and thanked the Goddess of Freedom for folding their beloved Hindustan to her bosom. Everyone except Savarkar retreated downstairs. Lakshmi had prepared some dessert and a light snack. After the poignant, emotional moments they all burst out talking at once.

Savarkar had needed to be alone. Freedom—forty-eight years after taking his oath . . . ! He was lucky to be alive, against all odds, to see it; so many of his friends, even Babarao, had not made it. For a long time he stood between the two flags, watching the stars . . . breathing the free air . . . until the first light of dawn . . .

Chapter Eighteen

1947: After Independence

The Radcliffe Award, giving decision on the final borders after partition, was now disclosed to the leaders of both countries. There was a furor—no one was happy. Some Hindu majority areas, even Lahore, went to Pakistan. Radcliffe later admitted he had earmarked Lahore for India but gave it to Pakistan in the final reckoning as it did not have any major cities. The canal colonies of the Sikh holy land Sheikhpura went to Pakistan too. Even so, Pakistan was not happy; it lost the major income-generating areas in East Punjab to Hindustan. And though it got the irrigation canals of the five rivers of Punjab, the rivers feeding these canals went to India!

In Bengal, Calcutta and Darjeeling, both of Hindu majority, were given to India. But the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which had a 98 percent non-Muslim population, went to Pakistan. All in all, Indians called the Award unjust and Pakistanis were in a rage for the "moth-eaten"—as they viewed it—Pakistan they got. But both were going to accept it for now.

A few days later Savarkar had a meeting with Nathuram. "Tatyarao, much to my sorrow, you emphatically told us to support the Congress government in the Delhi meeting . . ."

"Nathuram, I said then, and I am saying now, that it is not the Congress government but the national Government of India. We *must* be loyal to it and give it all our support."

"Tatyarao, how can you even think such a thing! By such an action you are party to the vivisection of our motherland!" cried Nathuram.

"No, Nathuram! I *don't* condone that, but we must safeguard our newly found freedom." Savarkar was firm.

"I think we should have boycotted the Congress government!" said Nathuram adamantly.

"Nathuram, do you want the whole of India to be engulfed in a civil war? *Don't* you see the danger? If we fight with the Government, how long do you think it will take the pockets of Muslims everywhere to make little Pakistans all over our motherland? No time at all!"

"They are doing that now! The Meos in the State of Alwar have rebelled."

"Yes, and Alwar is so close to Delhi! But Dr. Khare has taken prompt action and brought it all under control. We are fortunate that he is Chief Minister there! He has even taken many Muslim converts back into the Hindu fold. That is a positive action. What you are seeking to do is negative and will cause harm rather than good to our country."

Twin fires were glinting from Nathuram's eyes. "I also object to your giving permission to Dr. Shyamaprasad to become a cabinet minister!"

"I know, Nathuram. I do read your editorials!" replied Savarkar wryly. "I am older and wiser than you. I repeat again, that one must *always* think of the good of the country and not be bogged down by our individual griefs."

Nathuram was entirely unconvinced. He wondered if ill-health and old age had made Savarkar lose his grip. He had one more grievance. "Tatyarao, you went against the decision of the committee and hoisted the tri-color flag!"

"Nathuram, I will *not* disrespect the national flag of India—no committee decision can influence me otherwise. I am proud to have gained independence—such as it is—for Hindustan."

Nathuram looked disbelievingly at Savarkar. "I had so many hopes of you, Tatyarao, but none of your actions make

sense to me now." He swallowed convulsively. "You fought long and hard to prevent Congress from taking power; why stop now?"

Savarkar sighed. "Nathuram, Nathuram, you are not registering a word I am saying! There will be *no* internal fighting weakening our Hindustan. We must all look ahead. This is *our* country. Today Congress is in power, and tomorrow it can be us—but not if we run amok against our constitution!"

Abruptly, Nathuram took leave and left. There was no more to be said—here he and Savarkar parted in their ways. From now on he would not consult him in future policies and programs.

Meanwhile, in Nankana Sahib, the Sikhs were very viciously attacked by the Pakistanis, almost wiping them out. The Sikhs avenged themselves by killing Muslims elsewhere. There was just no end to it. In the middle of this, the border security force in Punjab was dissolved by Jinnah and Nehru . . . ! Whatever little protection it provided was also gone. There was now an exodus, going both ways, between India and Pakistan. Helplessly, people just packed up their belongings and took to the road—walking—only, there was no safe haven waiting for them at either end. Both countries were ill-equipped to accommodate their refugees.

For *months* chaos and violence reigned supreme. Nehru gave speech after speech, demanding, pleading, to the Hindustanis that they not take defense and justice in their own hands. The Government was responsible for that—only there *was* no government action! If the Hindustanis had not risen to defend themselves, the Pakistanis would have made their brutal way to Delhi, hacking, chopping, and looting them on the way. "With a laugh we took Pakistan; with a fight we will take Hindustan!"—this was the slogan on all the Pakistani lips as they continued their butchery. Unerringly, Savarkar issued a warning statement in September 1947 that India would be attacked on a front from Kashmir to Junagadh with the Nizam stabbing from within.

Toward the end of October, in Poonch, Kashmir, the Muslim peasants started rebelling against their Hindu landlords. The landlords drove them away from Kashmir into the tribal land of Pakistan. This enraged the aggressive tribesmen. Pakistan was quick to use this situation. On October 24, well-armed tribesmen attacked Kashmir, gunning straight for its capital, Srinagar. To lose Srinagar to the tribesmen was to lose Kashmir to Pakistan! The Maharaja immediately sent for help from India. Nehru, swiftly discarding the shackles of nonviolence, sent the Indian army to the borders of Kashmir. On October 26, the Maharaja acceded to the Indian State and the Indian army entered Kashmir, driving the tribesmen back toward their land.

But the situation was not resolved.

1948

The New Year brought no change to the Indian situation. Violent, *very* violent, outbreaks in Punjab and Bengal were still going on. Helpless and enraged refugees still crowded Delhi. The government machinery was slow in dealing with it all.

Gandhi, by his presence and his fast unto death, had controlled the violence in Calcutta, but many voices were being raised against him. Shouts of "Gandhi go away" and "Let Gandhi die" rang out. His house was stoned too. He then travelled to Delhi to work his "magic." But the anti-Gandhi slogans grew louder still there. The refugees, who had suffered horrendously at the Muslim hand, were enraged by Gandhi's pro-Muslim policy. Outrage against Gandhi spilled over. Guards had to be placed around Birla House, where he lived. Daily processions marched outside his home decrying him and his heart—which bled for the Muslims *only*.

On January 6, 1948, Sikh refugees were attacked by a Muslim mob in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan, while taking refuge in a gurdwara! The situation was tense.

Another political situation was brewing—during the transfer of power, decisions had to be made regarding the division of assets and liabilities. Since Pakistan would need cash for daily operations, it was determined—an informal and provisional agreement only—that ₹200 million would be given to Pakistan on August 15, and the balance of ₹550 million would be given within a few months of independence—*if* and only *if*, as Sardar made very clear, there were no outstanding issues. As for the liabilities, Mountbatten ruled—since Pakistan refused to consider the issue—that Pakistan would have to pay India the ₹2 billion due, divided over fifty years, starting from 1951. His decision was given and an order passed, but just *who* was going to ensure that

Pakistan respected it?

The question of the ₹550 million to be given to Pakistan was now up for discussion. Pakistan was strapped for immediate cash flow. The Bank refused to loan it any money against the security of the ₹550 million supposedly coming its way unless the requisite paperwork was handed in; only there was none to give as the agreement was not final. Pakistan was in a bind. The Government of India pulled out its bargaining chip—Sardar's clause of no outstanding issues—before it would hand over any money; at the very least the issue of Kashmir had to be resolved. India could hardly hand over cash to Pakistan essentially to fund attacks against herself. But what good was a bargaining chip if you are a broken reed before your dictator—the Mahatma?

Mountbatten was horrified with India's decision to hold back the money. All *he* saw—quite forgetting that he was now the Governor General of India and not the Viceroy of the British Raj—was his word to Pakistan not being fulfilled. There was only one option, only one man who could turn this tide for him—Gandhi. He rushed to Gandhi and poured out the tale.

January 13: Gandhi brought out his mighty weapon; he announced a fast until death—to compel the Government of

India to hand over the money to Pakistan. This reason was kept *secret* from the public. His apparent reason, reinstating Muslim refugees in their homes and returning any mosques taken over by Hindus in the city of Delhi, was much publicized.

On the same day, a train carrying Hindu and Sikh refugees from Bannu was attacked at Gujarat railway station by Muslims in *Hindustan*. Hundreds were killed and wounded, and women were abducted. Gandhi's timing of the fast for Muslims, and not Hindu and Sikh refugees, did not go down well with the Hindustanis, especially the refugees. Where were *they* to go? Who would fast for *their* rehabilitation? Who would make Pakistan safe for them? Who would make *Hindustan* safe for them? So many months had gone by, and they were in as much dire straits as ever. They stationed themselves outside Birla House, shouting: "Let Gandhi die!"

January 15: After Gandhi met Nehru and some other important Congress members, the Government of India—the broken reed—announced that it was now ready to hand over money to Pakistan, unconditionally. It was immediately apparent to many that Gandhi had twisted the government arm by his fast! It was the last straw, as far as Nathuram was concerned.

January 16: Nathuram and Apte bumped into Keshu in the first-floor general office of Savarkar Sadan.

"Namaskar, Nathuram, Apte!" said Keshu. "Have you come to see Tatyarao? You don't have an appointment!"

Savarkar was a stickler for appointments.

"No, Keshurao. We just stopped by casually. We are off to Delhi in a day or so," said Nathuram.

"Not to disrupt Gandhi's prayer meeting, I hope!" exclaimed Keshu. "We don't need those kinds of problems!"

Nathuram just smiled. Apte said, "Don't worry about that. We just need to collect material for an editorial there. Gandhi's fast is suspect—he has definitely used it to bully the Government!"

Nathuram and Apte were editors of the *Hindurashtra*.

"I am sure of it," agreed Keshu. "Sardar is going to be very displeased! Perhaps there will be a split in the Congress now."

The two took leave.

January 21: Keshu burst into Savarkar's office holding a newspaper. "Tatyarao, Tatyarao!" he cried, waving the paper wildly.

"I see, Keshu, you have read the news too!" said Savarkar, somewhat blandly.

"A bomb went off in Gandhi's prayer meeting! Apparently, it was 150 yards away from the meeting, so no one was hurt, but what does this mean?"

Savarkar was silent.

"Tatyarao! Do you think . . . ?"

"What should I think, Keshu? What do you want me to say?"

"Nathuram . . . he must still be in Delhi, isn't it?" Keshu asked, slowly.

"I have no idea, though it is very possible, Keshu," replied Savarkar. "With the Government browbeating the public into stopping any demonstrations, at least within the range of Birla House, and forcing the leaders of all parties to sign a peace agreement—Gandhi called off his fast on the eighteenth. I don't see Nathuram returning before he has collected material to write on *that*!"

"Well, this bomb . . . do you think . . . Nathuram . . . ?"

Savarkar was silent for a long time.

"I am very much afraid, Keshu. I have a *bad* feeling about this."

"Me too, Tatyarao," said Keshu worriedly. "But what can be the purpose of setting off a bomb like that?"

"Perhaps there was something else afoot that went wrong. One culprit, Madanlal Pahwa, has been apprehended. The police will most certainly torture him to get information."

Just then Gajanan came in. "Tatyarao, I recognize the secret police on the street outside our yard!" he exclaimed. "Did they forget that we have gained independence?"

"Gajanan, come in," said Savarkar. "Keshu and I were just talking about it. Apparently, the Government has some suspicions about me being involved in the bombing at Gandhi's meeting!"

"How ridiculous . . . !" Seeing the serious expression of the other two he added, "Isn't it . . . ? Why ever should Tatyarao be doing such a thing?"

"The police suspect a plot against Gandhi," said Keshu.

"And they think Tatyarao . . . ," cried Gajanan, very upset. "Tatyarao would *never* do such a thing! How many times has he said that to kill patriots of your country is the most heinous crime? How many times has he said that when we have a constitution, it is utterly wrong to commit such crimes? How many times—"

"Gajanan," said Keshu, "you know and I know, but does the Government understand it? I doubt it!"

"Calm down, Gajanan; sit down here," said Savarkar quietly, patting the divan.

Gajanan lowered himself to the divan, still upset.

"Gajanan, Nehru holds me in great dislike and suspicion. I am bound to be under a cloud in this case. But since I don't have anything to do with it, there is nothing for them to discover!"

"Yes, that's true," said Gajanan, giving it a thought. "We have a democracy now, and the arbitrary laws of the British are no more applicable!"

"I just hope," Keshu said, "that Nathuram did not have anything to do with it."

"Nathuram . . . !" Gajanan shot to his feet. "*Nathuram* in a plot against Gandhi! *Impossible!* He is so upright in all that he does!"

"Oh, do you really think so, Gajanan?" asked Keshu, relieved.

"Calm down, both of you," said Savarkar, raising both palms. "Let us not conjecture. Whatever the plot was, it has misfired and hopefully wiser counsel will prevail with the culprits. We sit tight and go about our business; not much else we can do.

Don't even mention the thought to anyone—rumors spread like wildfire."

"How about telling Narayanrao?" asked Gajanan.

Narayanrao was now living with his family in Patilwada, Dadar. His health was not good.

"Definitely not!" exclaimed Savarkar. "He is unwell. What is there to tell, anyway? We know nothing."

"I shudder to think what might happen if Gandhi is killed—especially at Nathuram's hand!" exclaimed Keshu.

"I imagine," said Savarkar, wryly, "that I will become suspect number one, for one thing! And Hindutva will be the next victim, for another."

"Oh God!" said Keshu, sinking his head in his hands.

Later, after he had reflected for a bit, Keshu approached Lakshmi. "Lakshmi," he said without preamble, "I am going ask you to do something you won't like, but it must be done!"

Lakshmi was very much alarmed. Whatever was the matter? "Keshu!" she cried. "What must I do?"

"You have to leave for Poona, today. I will take you there."

"Go to Poona?" asked Lakshmi, puzzled. "To Madhavrao's? Oh no! Did something happen to him?"

"No, Lakshmi," assured Keshu quickly. "It is just a feeling I have . . . . Just in case things get difficult here, I want you to be safe in Poona."

"But what can go wrong? We live so quietly. Tatyarao is unwell most of the time; he is away from active politics. So . . . ?"

"Please, Lakshmi, just this once I must beg you to do as I say—no questions asked. *Please!*"

"Keshu!" cried Lakshmi, clutching him around the waist. "You are scaring me!"

Keshu held her close. "There isn't anything to tell, Lakshmi," he muttered, his lips close to her forehead. "My instinct is saying there could be trouble. I will be more comfortable if I don't have to worry about your safety."

Lakshmi looked up into his eyes. "Very well, Keshu," she said slowly. "It has been a very, very difficult time for you the

last few years. I will go, no questions asked. But you *will* take care, won't you?"

"I will, Lakshmi. I will."

A little later, they were at the Dadar station. There was no time to waste, as he had to catch the evening train back. He didn't want to be away any longer than necessary.

As day after day went by, Savarkar, Keshu, and Gajanan watched the papers anxiously. The Delhi and Bombay police were investigating. There was some mention of a kidnap plot. Madanlal Pahwa was interrogated, but not much was got out of him, apparently. There was no mention of Nathuram or even Apte. By Thursday, January 29, the three heaved a collective sigh of relief.

"Tatyarao," said Keshu, "it was a storm in a teacup. I panicked for nothing!"

"Certainly that's what it looks like," agreed Savarkar. "The police are British trained—we know how brutal and efficient they are. If they found nothing, we have no worries!"

"They don't seem to anticipate trouble, either," added Keshu. "The security measures at Gandhi's prayer meetings have not particularly been increased. They are not even searching the people as they enter."

"In view of all the threats people are making in Delhi," Savarkar reflected, "*that* is not very wise of them, is it? The January 22 brutal attack on Parachinar camp, by Pakistani tribesmen, has angered Delhi again. Of what value is Gandhi's peace treaty with the people of Delhi when Muslim atrocities are still going on against the Hindus?"

"Oh God, when will Pakistan stop the butchery? *When?* They are attacking refugees, people who are already hurting and have lost everything. It is unbearably cruel," said Gajanan.

"There is no value to Hindu lives," said Savarkar. "Indeed, the Government will bury—in order to maintain the fiction that freedom was won without bloodshed—this and many other pieces of our history!"

They fell silent.

"I wonder," said Gajanan, voicing the thought uppermost in their minds, "where Nathuram is now?"

"Far away from Delhi, I hope," said Keshu fervently. "Gandhi's behavior will only rile him more!"

Later, Keshu spoke to Lakshmi on the phone and assured her that there was no cause for worry. He would come and get her on Saturday.

The three had counted their chickens too soon, *much* too soon.

Friday, January 30, 5:15 p.m.: Gandhi, walking down the pathway to his prayer meeting, was shot fatally three times, in the chest and stomach, at point-blank range. The assassin was apprehended immediately. This shocking news hit every corner of India, but not much else was known.

In Savarkar Sadan the atmosphere was very tense. No one knew *what* to think. They were all sitting in Savarkar's room. Gajanan heard the phone ringing and ran downstairs. A few minutes later he walked in, his face white as a sheet.

"Tatyarao," he croaked, "Tatyarao, Pakistan radio gave out the name of the shooter."

He paused and swallowed convulsively. Everyone guessed what was coming next. "Nathuram, Tatyarao . . . *Nathuram!*"

A long silence fell in the room. Then Savarkar said calmly, "You know, a few days ago we wondered . . . and now it has happened. I am sure the Government will try to involve me in this; entrap me, too, perhaps. Congress has long been looking for an opportunity to get me!"

"No, Tatyarao, no!" cried Keshu, distraught. "They *cannot*—"

"Keshu," said Savarkar sharply, "this is no time to lose our cool. I expect they will come and get me any time."

Keshu turned away. Tatyarao to be taken to jail! For committing no crime! Is this how the Government of *Free* India intended to pay back his forty-eight years of unstinting, selfless service? He felt a sob welling up and choked it down. Tatyarao was right—it wouldn't do to lose his cool. He ran his right hand

wildly through his hair, trying to calm down. A hand patted his shoulder gently. Savarkar was behind him.

"Keshu, I am not the only one they will come after, you know. I am afraid they will go after all of you."

"What about democracy, Tatyarao?"

Savarkar laughed ironically. "Don't be naïve, Keshu. Tomorrow, if I am around, I will issue a statement condemning the assassination of Gandhi. But now I think I will pack my bag. I must be prepared if they come for me. Vishwas will help me. You retire for the night. Who knows what the next moment will bring?"

Savarkar meticulously packed his bag, including all his medicines and a bedding roll. Sleep was not really possible that night, but they all tried. Before dawn, there was a loud banging. A CID car was at the door. The inspector demanded to see Pulakeshiraj Soman and Gajanan Damle. Within minutes Keshu and Gajanan were led out to the car and taken to the Arthur Road Police Station, without preamble. *The ordeal is about to begin,* thought Keshu. *Thank God they left Tatyarao alone!*

January 31: The newspapers were full of details—Nathuram Godse's name was disclosed as the assassin. He was well known as the staunch pro-Hindu Brahmin editor of *Agrani* and *Hindurashtra*, writing against the Congress and Gandhi, with a close connection to Savarkar. The people's wrath boiled over. By 9:30 a.m., a maddened Hindu ruffian crowd shouting anti-Brahmin slogans attacked the Brahmin Seva Mandal in Dadar, threw all its property out, and set it afire; the Hindu Mahasabha office there got the same treatment. A restaurant nearby owned by a staunch Hindu, Mr. Panshikar, was wiped out too. Now the crowd marched on to Savarkar Sadan.

A phone call had alerted Savarkar of this danger. Balarao Savarkar and Bhide Guruji, both close associates of Savarkar, were there to help. Hardly were all the doors and windows secured when a large crowd was upon them. They battered the doors and threw brickbats at the windows, but the iron grilles

and the sturdy wood doors held out. Balarao and Bhide Guruji held the fort downstairs. Savarkar, holding a dagger in his hand, stood with grim determination at the top of the stairs, ready to go down fighting.

"Mai, Vishwas, find a hiding place! I'll take care of this!" he said.

But Mai and Vishwas stood right by him, grabbing whatever they could use as weapons.

Crash! The rear door of the apartment below was broken down. The crowd was surging in. Savarkar, the great patriot of India, was inches away from being mowed down by a raging, senseless crowd.

At this moment, armed police arrived most opportunely and ruthlessly dispersed the crowd.

"Mr. Savarkar," said the inspector a few minutes later, "I seriously advise you to go away for a few days—for your safety."

"And where would you suggest I go?" asked Savarkar grimly. "I am a well-known figure, recognized everywhere. Should *I* run away like a coward? Like a criminal? No! I will not move an inch!"

"Mr. Savarkar, there is no saying what that crowd would have done had we not reached here in time!" pointed out the inspector.

"Inspector"—Savarkar's eyes were glinting—"that crowd was attacking me just because of my staunch pro-Hindutva principles! I will *never* abandon my principles. I am prepared to die for them!"

"But, Mr. Savarkar—" expostulated the inspector.

"Not another word on the subject, Inspector! If you are so worried for my safety, you may keep guard on my house. But with or without that guard, I am staying put. That's it!"

There was no more to be said. Other friends and associates who had arrived by now tried pleading with Savarkar but in vain. Savarkar had *never* run away from a situation. Two armed guards were posted outside Savarkar Sadan from then on. The immediate danger was past—or was it?

The crowd had blood lust in their hearts. They wanted a victim, and one Savarkar was as good as another. They surged toward Narayanrao's residence, Patilwada. Narayanrao was abed in a weakened state. News of the coming crowd reached Shantabai's ears, along with a rumor that Vishwas had been thrown down from the second story.

"He Ram!" she cried. "These evil ones . . . ! Children!"

Shriharsh, Chapala, and Nima were the only ones there; Ashoka and Vikram had left a few minutes earlier to check on Savarkar.

"Children, it is time for the Savarkar family to show their mettle. If we die, we die fighting! But sh-h-h! Don't disturb your father. Let him rest."

Quickly they secured the house. Shantabai gathered heavy stone pestles and iron ladles from the kitchen and gave them to the kids. They also kept stout sticks handy. Then she dipped into the powdered hot red pepper jar and made paper packets for the kids.

"Throw this into the eyes of anyone who comes close. Let them burn, the Devils! *Curse* them!"

All three children, though thirteen and under, unflinchingly took positions of defense. They were going to face the mob fearlessly! Lastly, Shantabai grabbed an evil-looking sickle and took a militant stance in the entrance room. It was not a minute too soon.

Crash! The window glass shattered and a brickbat flew in. Wild yelling and roaring was going on outside. A mean-looking face tried to poke through the grille.

"Oy, bai!" shouted the man. "Where is the doctor? Bring him out! Oy! Why are you holding that sickle?"

Shantabai swung the sickle menacingly. "Come! Come! Stick your head through the bars and I'll show you why." She made vicious chopping motions. "Threaten my family, will you!"—the kids were saying something in the background—"we Savarkars are no cowards, even women and children—" the face disappeared "*—hey!*"

The crowd behind seemed to be looking left.

"What is . . . ?" Shantabai was bewildered.

Loud shouts could be heard from outside. "Hit him! Hit him! Let him die!"

Another voice yelled, "Burn him alive!"

"Aai, Aai," Shriharsh was yelling. "Dada went out from the back door!"

Shantabai screamed and rushed to open the front door. Outside, a horrific scene was before her eyes—Narayanrao lay unconscious amidst a scattering of stones and brickbats; blood, flowing copiously through a nasty gash on his head, was pooling around him. The crowd, now that they had bagged their victim, hung back and started melting away. Shantabai dropped the sickle and rushed to Narayanrao's side.

Shantabai sank to her knees and cried, *"Aho!"*—she patted his cheek—"*aho!* Talk to me—please! Someone . . . *someone* get an ambulance! *Please!*"

Madhubhau Kale, Narayanrao's sister's son, coming to check on them, arrived just then and took charge. Narayanrao was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. The rest of the family was taken to a safe place.

All over Bombay Province there was an outbreak of indiscriminate violence against Brahmins, Hindu Mahasabhaites, and RSS members. Later that day, the police made one more visit to Savarkar Sadan. They went through the whole house looking for incriminating evidence. Savarkar sat in his bedroom, controlled and deadpan. It was not the first time he was being subjected to such arbitrary house searches—but it was the first time in *free* India! Even in free India he had no rights, apparently.

Lakshmi called a little while later. News had reached her about the goings-on. She was ready to pack her bags and come to Bombay, but Savarkar forbade it. He knew that Keshu wanted her away from any danger. There was no news to tell her. Keshu and Gajanan were being held in isolation; they were not allowed communication with *anyone*, inside or outside the jail.

Savarkar had issued his statement condemning the assassination of Gandhi. But the media painted Savarkar as the mastermind of the Gandhi-murder plot. Daily vituperation against him poured out. It didn't seem to matter to anyone that there was no evidence, nothing to support this assumption! The Government went on a spree of making arrests. This government persecution struck fear in the hearts of many. Police were also making sweeping searches in Savarkar Sadan. These were grim days. Savarkar issued another statement, reiterating his view that anarchy was the great enemy of a newly independent nation.

February 4: Deputy Police Commissioner Nagarwala came to Savarkar Sadan with the State doctor, Dr. Mehta. Savarkar had to undergo a medical check-up and was declared fit—even though he was running a temperature at the moment and had been ailing the last two years.

February 5: At dawn, the familiar banging on the door was heard. Narayan, Gajanan's brother who was taking over his duties in his absence, opened the door.

"We are here to arrest Mr. Vinayak Savarkar as a measure of preventive detention under the Bombay Public Security Measures Act!" announced Officer John Claus.

"Preventive detention . . . ! What do you mean?" exclaimed Narayan.

"The Government of Bombay claims that Mr. Savarkar is 'promoting hatred by inciting Hindus against Muslims.' He is also 'inciting persons to commit acts of violence against Muslims and persons who are endeavoring to bring about unity between Hindus and Muslims.' He is, therefore, acting 'in a manner prejudicial to the public safety and peace of Greater Bombay' and so must be detained."

Narayan was chilled to the core. *What* a concocted reason for detaining Tatyarao . . . ! The provisions of this Act were very *nasty* too. If charged with conspiracy to murder, the sentence was severe—perhaps death or transportation—and conviction was much easier to obtain for it than for a charge

of abetment to murder. It would be a trial without a jury with only fifteen days time for appeals. *Oh God! Oh dear God,* he thought, *the Government really wants to vanquish Tatyarao!*

On shaky legs he went to wake Savarkar up. He was awake and getting his stuff together. Savarkar, very calm, very controlled, very remote, walked down the staircase toward Claus. Vishwas, Narayan, and Mai trailed behind him. Each wanted to hang on to Savarkar, prevent him from being taken—rail . . . rant . . . *something!* But Savarkar scorned a display of emotions at this time. Yes, this arrest, this whole persecution of him that the Government was indulging in, was a great insult, a great injustice; but neither he nor his family would dignify it with a protest or an emotional outburst. That was *that*! And so the little troop came down the stairs with whatever composure they could muster.

Just as Savarkar was about to step out, he stopped short. "Excuse me, sir. I would like to use the toilet," he said.

Claus was taken aback; a vision of Savarkar's historic escape from the bathroom porthole of the SS *Morea* shimmered before his eyes.

Savarkar gave a wry laugh, reading his mind. "Do not worry, sir. My request is not a ruse. I am too old now to pull off a stunt like *that*! Nor is there any reason for it."

Claus looked sheepishly at the floor. A few minutes later, Savarkar was ready to get into the police van.

"I am a second-timer you can say, sir," he said to Claus as he stepped in.

"What do you mean, Mr. Savarkar?" asked Claus, puzzled.

"I am an old hand at going to jail, you know. For fourteen years I was in prison in British India, and now I get to experience jail in free India too."

Claus was discomfitted. He was not enjoying this duty—at all. The door of the van slammed shut and the van moved off, taking Savarkar to the same jail as Keshu and Gajanan.

Now Mai and Vishwas held each other and cried helplessly, as the van whisked Savarkar into the faint light of the dawn. His family, friends, associates, and even his lawyer would not hear from him again for a long, long time—until March 23, in fact.

Chapter Nineteen

For Keshu, kept in isolation, the days were fraught with worry. What was going on outside? Was Tatyarao safe? Would the Government leave him alone? Such thoughts ate at him every minute of the day. Mostly he paced his cell back and forth. Every so often he was taken out to be interrogated. He could truthfully say he had no idea of any conspiracy to kill Gandhi and knew of no one's involvement in it. Beyond that he was unforthcoming. There was no saying what innocent words they could twist! It galled him that democracy in free India had given him no rights. One could just be picked up in the middle of the night from one's home and thrown in jail—no crime done—and then be kept cut off from the world. Even under the British Raj in 1913, he had fared better than *this*; at least he was allowed to retain a lawyer then.

Perhaps it would be wiser to adopt a calm, nonaggressive, at least apparently cooperative attitude. That could serve some purpose—get him some news. But he was a roiling mass of emotions, barely controlled; such wisdom was beyond him.

Fortunately for Keshu, a warder, Gadre, seemed sympathetically disposed toward him. Keeping in mind that this might just be a police ploy, he still made friendly overtures—if he didn't talk to *someone,* he would go mad! That's how he learned about the attack on Savarkar's house, about Narayanrao, who was critically injured, and about the plight of all the others. He was horrified and filled with the pain of it all. Why was this happening? Why, oh *why*?

The jail was filling up with inmates. He could even hear agonized screams of pain—were they being tortured? He had to find out.

"Psst, Gadre," he called out as Gadre walked by his cell, "what are all these screams?"

"Saheb, some convicts don't like being interrogated, that's all."

Yes, it must be torture—what else? It had not come his way, yet. But Gajanan . . . ?

"Gadre, my friend is not harmed?"

"Saheb, I have to go. Can't talk now—he's okay but knows nothing."

Keshu wondered why the police were going easy on him and Gajanan, too, apparently. Had they not made up their minds about Tatyarao yet? He prayed that wiser counsel would prevail with the Government—there was *no* reason to be arresting Tatyarao. How could they have any evidence since he was innocent? Would they *dare* concoct some? Would they put him through the same kind of farcical trial of the British Raj—one that charged people on mere suspicion and declared them guilty on flimsy evidence? They wouldn't—*would* they?

February 5: Keshu was brought before Nagarwala.

"Soman," said Nagarwala, "you have been giving us the runaround for a few days. It won't do anymore!"

"I have spoken nothing but the truth, Mr. Nagarwala—Savarkar was involved in no conspiracy to kill Gandhi; no one from Savarkar Sadan was," said Keshu emphatically.

"You think," Nagarwala sneered, "we don't know of the close connection between Savarkar and Godse? Huh?"

"Savarkar is an important all-India leader of the Hindu Mahasabha; Godse was a prominent member of the Poona Hindu Sabha. There is bound to be a connection!"

"Godse came and went by free will at Savarkar Sadan, Mr. Soman."

"A lot of people did, Mr. Nagarwala. There is a crowd in there most days—Savarkar is to the Hindu Mahasabha what

Gandhi was to the Congress. Members were welcome any time in the office on the first floor. They had to make appointments only if they wanted to meet Savarkar."

"And there was no such appointment between Godse and Savarkar?" asked Nagarwala skeptically.

"No, not around that time."

"He didn't meet them at all? Godse and Apte didn't visit the Savarkar Sadan?" Nagarwala strolled to Keshu's chair and rested against the desk.

"You don't expect me to remember all the details of who came and went and when, do you? Why is it important anyway?" Keshu looked up at Nagarwala.

"Mr. Soman," said Nagarwala aggressively, "I am *convinced* that Savarkar is the mastermind behind the conspiracy to murder Mahatmaji!"

"Convinced!" cried Keshu. "Based upon *what*?"

"Based upon my *gut*!" hissed Nagarwala, shoving his face close to Keshu's. "And if I find one—*one*—person who can put Godse and Savarkar together in January, we will hang him!"

"Hang him . . . !" cried Keshu, incensed. "He is *innocent*! But what do you care? You failed to protect Gandhi and now you will take it out on Savarkar!"

"Gandhi! Gandhi!" shouted Nagarwala, getting mad. "Take his name with respect! He was our Mahatma."

"Not mine!" retorted Keshu, jumping to his feet, forcing Nagarwala to move away. "Where's the disrespect in using his last name?"

"You . . . ! We'll get you—and Savarkar too! We have orders from the very top to get him any way we can!"

"Orders from the top . . . !" Keshu pounced on the words. "Are you saying that Nehru has given orders to get Savarkar—by hook or by crook?"

"I am not saying anything!" shouted Nagarwala, angry with himself for being tactless.

"What *other* 'orders from the top' have you received? I *see*, now. I *do*," cried Keshu, beside himself with anger.

"Gandhi—with his sexual exploits, his fasts, and his arbitrary commands—was becoming a nuisance to the Government of India, was he? Is that why you were so *very* incompetent in your Mahatma's bombing investigation? Did you have 'orders from the top' for *that* too?"

Thwack! Nagarwala struck Keshu across his face, hard. Keshu lunged at him; immediately three or four havaldars pounced on him and restrained him. Keshu strained wildly at their hold.

"By this hounding of Savarkar, you are just trying to pull wool over everyone's eyes," he yelled. "Yes, *yes*, that's how it must be! You don't want anyone to focus on *why* you failed to protect the Mahatma."

Thwack! Another slap resounded.

"Hitting me will keep my mouth shut, you think? Keep the world quiet? Ha!"

"So brave you are now!" jeered Nagarwala, chest heaving in anger. "Soon, very soon, you will be spilling your guts—*no one* can withstand our interrogation!"

"Do what you will. Tatyarao is innocent; what charge can you bring against him?"

"Ha!" laughed Nagarwala. "Listen, O havaldars. Listen to the innocent!"

They all indulged in raucous laughter.

"Have you charged Tatyarao already? *Have you?*" Keshu cried, acutely distressed. "Have—you—charged—him?"

Nagarwala laughed again; Keshu's distress smoothed his anger.

"That hits a nerve, huh? No we haven't, but he is here in custody from today, arrested as a measure of preventive detention! Havaldar, take him to the other room!"

Keshu was chilled to the bone. He was hardly aware of being marched out. Tatyarao in custody! Oh God! The words "orders from the top . . . in any way" were ringing in his head, over and over. Nehru . . . he wouldn't take his hatred of Tatyarao that far . . . would he? *Would he?*

Keshu's days of mere interrogation were over. He was taken to a darkened room with a big block in the center. Four or five burly havaldars grabbed hold of him as another stripped him of his clothes. Instinctively Keshu struggled, but it was useless. They dragged him to the block and forced him to lie down on it. He was tied securely, legs apart, hands stretched out. Keshu's chest was heaving. He was filled with rage—and fear. This was it; from now on he could expect to be tortured. Some of those screams echoing in the jail would be his.

Two havaldars started hitting the soles of his feet with a thick coir rope knotted at the end. For variety, two others beat occasional blows on his body. Keshu clenched his teeth; the blows were hard enough to jar them. Eyes tightly shut, he tried to dissociate his mind from his body. He must focus on the Bhagavad Gita—just like the Andaman days, he told himself. He started reciting it to himself, through the pain.

"Aaaargh." His eyes snapped open, his body trying to curl forward. Excruciating pain ran from his groin up his abdomen. Someone had grabbed his testicles, viciously. Again. And again. Through the fog of pain he could hear raucous laughter.

"The bastard is impotent," said an ugly voice. "So old but no children! What need has he of these?"

There was more laughter.

"*Arre* Sakharam! Maybe it is his wife that's barren!"

Keshu struggled wildly, but it only added to his pain.

Later they questioned him again. He had no information to give. No amount of torture was going to make him spout lies about Tatyarao.

His days were now filled with torture interspersed with interrogation. The whole repertoire—of belting, beating on the buttocks, powdered hot red pepper pushed up his anus, biting by red ants—oh, this was *torture* indeed!—and then back to the hitting of the feet—was unleashed against him. The worst of it all was yet to come; on March 10 sticks were shoved through the quick of his fingernails and the nails ripped out with a

vicious tug—one by one. He had screamed then, over and over and over.

The days of stoic silence were now gone—but he had given no information. He was tossed in his cell, where he fell in a miserable heap. The pain radiating from his bleeding fingers filled his brain; his body hurt—everywhere. He couldn't walk; the bones in his feet were broken. He had ant-bites all over; he couldn't scratch them now. He was afire, from the inside out. All but unconscious, his mind dwelt on what he had pieced together from Gadre's information.

The Government had been aware from Madanlal Pahwa's statement—obtained by subjecting him to brutal torture—taken soon after he was arrested on January 20, that some conspiracy was afoot; the Delhi police even had the identification of his accomplices—editors of *Hindurashtra*, he had told them—much before January 30. Even so the police had been *so* slipshod, *so* inefficient, that they had failed to nab Nathuram and Apte . . . ! Dr. Jain, Madanlal's friend, had gone to Morarji Desai, the Home Minister of Bombay Province, and actually *told* him of the plot to assassinate Gandhi, mentioning Nathuram by name. Incredibly, Morarji had failed to tell the police or to take *any* action . . . ! *Why* . . . ?

Though it was known that the conspirators of January 20 were Maharashtrian Brahmins from Bombay Province, the Delhi police and the Bombay police were *not* pooling their information. Each played a lone hand. Sardar, the Home Minister of India, appointed one man to be in charge of the investigation only *after* the assassination—when it was too late to save the Mahatma's life.

The police system, which had worked so brilliantly and efficiently during the British Raj, was famous; in free India it was still the same system, the same officers and policemen on the whole, and *yet* it had fallen apart at the seams when it came to saving the Mahatma's life . . . ! With ten days and a culprit in hand—who had given vital information upon being brutally

tortured—they had *still* failed to foil the plot to assassinate Gandhi. How? *Why?*

At the *very* least, they could have provided stringent protection—screened the people entering Birla house, checked them for weapons. The British had spent a fortune to protect the life of the Mahatma—an armed guard went everywhere with him, sometimes "coincidentally." *Why* was it missing in free India, especially when so many refugees had been clamoring for his death outside the Birla House?

And now, *now* that the Mahatma was no more, the whole brutal police machinery was unleashed upon thousands of innocent people—Hindu Mahasabha and RSS leaders and members, or simply anyone who may have had a remote connection to Nathuram or Savarkar! A total of twenty-five thousand people were arrested and locked up. *Twenty-five thousand!* So many participants in a conspiracy . . . ! Was this a conspiracy or a joke? Or was the Government just using the Mahatma's death to wipe out the Hindutva-minded people and their movement? Removing the competition . . . ?

Indians were now washing their hands off Hindu consolidation, Hindutva, and Savarkar, just to stay safe from the Government. *Tatyarao reduced to becoming a pariah! Oh God! Oh God! This couldn't be happening.*

Keshu curled up in a fetal position, gripping his knees with his tortured, bloody hands. There was so much pain, so much pain! But he had not broken. Tatyarao would—*could*—not be charged. All night he kept that thought close, to get what comfort he could from it. Come morning, it was wrenched away.

"Hey you!" It was Sakharam. "You're going home today!"

Going home? How . . . ? Why . . . ?

"We don't need you anymore! Savarkar is charged as a co-conspirator in the murder of Mahatmaji."

No . . . no . . . no! Sakharam was walking away. Keshu tried to rush to the cell door; he fell—his feet couldn't take his weight. He crawled there.

"*Oy! O-o-o-oy!*" he yelled. "How can it be . . . ? *How* can it be . . . ?"

Sakharam's hateful voice floated to his ears: "Badge, one of the conspirators, is giving testimony. He says Apte told him that they met Savarkar and took his blessings. The trial is in a special court."

Apte *told* Badge? Hearsay evidence—and a tissue of lies at that! Based on that flimsy non-evidence, they had charged India's foremost patriot . . . ! Trial in a special court, that too!

Helplessly Keshu burst out into hysterical laughter; it went on and on. It was unbearable—*unbearable*. Savarkar, whom the British had embroiled in two unjust trials in the Special Tribunal Court and sentenced to fifty years transportation, was being embroiled in one more in *free* India? Nehru, who had been vociferous in condemning such courts as a freedom fighter, had now, as the Prime Minister of India, resurrected the hated special court for Tatyarao's trial? *O Power, thou are the great corrupter of ideals!* Keshu's laughter turned to sobs—heartbreaking sobs—welling up from deep within.

Was Nehru *really* going to allow the Government of India to go through with this farce to the very end? Was his hatred for Tatyarao not *yet* assuaged with the stigma, the humiliation that they had heaped upon his head to date? Was the Prime Minister of Free India going to watch in silence, without a protest, while the Government under his command unjustly and wrongfully, based on woefully inadequate evidence, tried a foremost patriot of India for a crime he did not commit?

What *was* Tatyarao's crime? That he loved his country and his people too much? That he sacrificed his whole life for them? That he stuck by his principles and tried to expose the shenanigans of the Congress? That he tried to save his country from being ripped apart? That he encouraged the Hindus to defend themselves when the Government could—*would*—not?

What was his *crime*?

Oh, Tatyarao . . . Tatyarao, what is this heartless Government going to do to you? Find you guilty? Hang you? Transport you? Freedom and democracy—what empty words these are in free India! Did Tatyarao not count his blessings for getting freedom, even if it wasn't exactly as he dreamed? Did he not support the Government of Free India? Did he not encourage his people to join the Government? He sacrificed his whole youth and prime years fighting for freedom, and now the Government of Free India wants a stake of his old age too?

Keshu threw back his head and wailed; the tears wouldn't stop. He clutched the bars with both hands and tried to drag himself up. Blood oozed from his pulpy fingertips and ran down the bars—he didn't care. The Government of *Free* India wanted to discredit Tatyarao, strip him of whatever he had—his name, his glory, the love his people had for him, *everything*! His name must be wiped out from the history of India—what better way than to declare him guilty of murdering the Mahatma? It was ingenious! But it mustn't work! Oh God! Oh *God*! It *mustn't* work!

"Aaa-a-argh! . . . Aaa-a-a-aargh! Justice must prevail! This is *our* beloved Hindustan—*free* at last, justice must prevail here!" Keshu was yelling. "O Mother, it is not *you*, but those in power, ruling in your land—they are the treacherous ones. *They* are! . . . Aaa-a-argh!"

"Bastard," yelled a warder, "cut out that racket!"

He raised his baton and hit Keshu on the head through the bars.

"Justice . . . must . . . prevail . . . . O beloved Mother, *justice* . . . must . . . *prevail*," cried Keshu as he sank slowly to the ground in a heap.

Epilogue

Though democracy in the newly free India proved to be dispensable—a mere puppet in the hands of her High Command—the judiciary did not. Truth and justice *did* prevail.

On February 10, 1949—after spending a year in jail—the Special Court, Red Fort, Delhi, acquitted Savarkar of the charge of being part of a conspiracy to kill Gandhi.

But *still* Savarkar was *not* allowed to walk out free in Delhi. The Government was *not* willing to reinstate the honor of this deserving patriot.

The Delhi Magistrate served an order prohibiting Savarkar from leaving the Red Fort area immediately. A few hours later by another order under the Punjab Public Security Measures Act, Savarkar was expelled from Delhi and escorted by police straight to Savarkar Sadan, Mumbai. Additionally, he was prohibited from entering the Delhi area for a period of three months. Until his death, Savarkar continued to live a life of government persecution and revilement, with a curtain dropped on his role in the Freedom Movement of India. Nevertheless, he continued to work for the good of his country and people.

On February 26, 1966, at age 82 Savarkar willingly embraced death in the highest tradition of Yoga, by abstaining from partaking any food or water; he was filled with the spirit of great satisfaction of having fulfilled his burden of duty in this mortal coil:

Blessed am I, blessed am I,
I know of no duty now,
Blessed am I, blessed am I,
I have fulfilled what I wished to achieve.

Today, forty-six years after his death, the government persecution and revilement continues, the curtain remains dropped—but *no more . . . !*

That Savarkar's contribution to India should be negated to bolster the political aspirations of *any* political party is unacceptable. Justice demands that he be accorded his rightful place as one of the finest men that India has produced.

The truth cannot—and shall not—be hidden!

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ANURUPA CINAR

Photo by Nancy Carbonaro

Deeply moved by Savarkar's life-story, Anurupa Cinar was determined to write a novel showcasing him before an international audience—persevering with her dream despite being laid off in the tough economy. A widow with three young children, she currently lives in Massachusetts.
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